NO. 1

WOWEE KAZOWIE!

75 ¢

HELLO EVERYBODY!

...and welcome to the first ish of Woweekazowie!. This little mag has been a long time coming. We all got to know one another thru Dean Mullaney, who saw our names in various lettercols at Marvel, and decided we ought to get together on some sort of mutual project. This book is the result of about a year and a half of work. We all hope it won't be that long before the second ish comes along. But we'll see about that. In any case, if you'll squint over to the right a few inches, you'll see what we have for this long-awaited (for us) ish. Whether we came up with the kind of stuff a fanzine should have is up to you. Let us know, and you better believe we'll read each letter. We're glad to have you with us!

WILLIE BLYBERG
Editor-for-the-ish

This book is humbly dedicated to my
MOTHER AND FATHER,
who for some reason still believe in me...

WAB
76

WOWEEKAZOWIEDITORIAL!

I think this is a pretty good first issue for a bunch of guys who've done very little work on fanzines. As WOWEE's first editor, it's been my responsibility to set a standard of quality for the book. I feel this zine you're holding in your hands deserves a place in fandom. If you have any comments or criticisms, please write me, and please give me a break and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

As you'll see in the months to come, WOWEE is a communal project. We'll all get a shot at being editor. This presents a number of problems, and deadlines may be missed, but the variety of content will be worth the wait in my opinion.

Dean Mullaney will edit #2, and all I know about it is that it will contain the second part of my VICTORY strip. If response is good, Vic will be in WOWEE permanently. As is, he's set for a three-issue run.

Now, I'd like to thank a few folks for their help: first, Emil Novak & Kean Crowe, of Queen City Books, whose pre-publication support was much-needed; Dom Rampino, who provided the same financial aid; our guest artists- Tim Corrigan, creator of ELASTICWORM, GARGUS, and Odin knows how many other strips,- Rich Schindler, my good buddy from Connecticut, who collects <u>everything</u> Corben and Smith do,- and Don Benner, PLASTIC MAN fan supreme, and a darn good artist no matter what he thinks I said about his stuff. All good fellows, and I appreciate the work and encouragement they provided.

I await your verdict on #1, and your orders for #2, when the whole WOWEE gang returns with more of the same (or better, depending on how you feel about this one...).

Take it easy...

WAB 6/18/76

THIS ISSUE'S
GOODIES

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The WOWEEKAZOWIE staff: .....DEAN MULLANEY
BOB RODI
PETE IRO
KIM THOMPSON
JACK FROST
KJ ROBBINS
WILLIE BLYBERG
This issue's guest artists: ... RICH SCHINDLER
DON BENNER
TIM CORRIGAN

CONTRIBUTIONS: We'd like to have more contributors, particularly artists. If you're interested, please write first!!! And if possible, send a xeroxed copy of some of your work. We will not accept responsibility for unsolicited contributions, and will most likely chuck 'em.

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All characters used herein are (c) their respective companies; strips, articles, and art are (c) the writers and artists.

Recent months have seen a flood of new titles coming from the major companies. Both DC and Marvel have been giving us what amounts to about two new books per month, on the average ... and there are still more to come.

DC, however, seems to be less inclined toward looking ahead as looking back. With a new publisher and new staff members (many of whom came directly from Marvel), DC now has the incentive to pick up their back-log of characters and catch up with themselves.

This "revival craze" seems to have been started by the tremendous response to the revival of the Legion of Super-Heroes in 1974. Infantino, intrigued by the jump in sales when the Legion took over the Superboy magazine, found revivals looking more and more attractive.

About a year later, with the mystery comics craze on its last leg, Infantino introduced FIRST ISSUE SPECIAL, a reincarnation of SHOWCASE, and planted some revivals in those pages ... Metamorpho, the Creeper, Dr.Fate, and the New Gods. However, Infantino apparently lost interest in FIS, and preferred to drop the book (which would have necessitated waiting for sales figures on certain issues) and just launch new books from proposed FIS tryouts. Thus, Robin and Batgirl became BATMAN FAMILY... the Freedom Fighters tryout became FREEDOM FIGHTERS#1, and so on. It should be noted that even these new books (as well as others, like SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS, KARATE KID, and the JOKER) are indirect revivals in that they deal with characters already introduced elsewhere.

And so... Infantino introduced a slew of new tryout books, intending them for only a three or four- issue run. However, Infantino's policies no longer reign at DC, and it looks as though the revivals are here to stay (at least, as long as they sell). It was a twist of good fortune that timed Infantino's resignation and Jenette Kahn's takeover so well. Infantino introduced the books, Kahn will give them a push.

The revivals themselves:

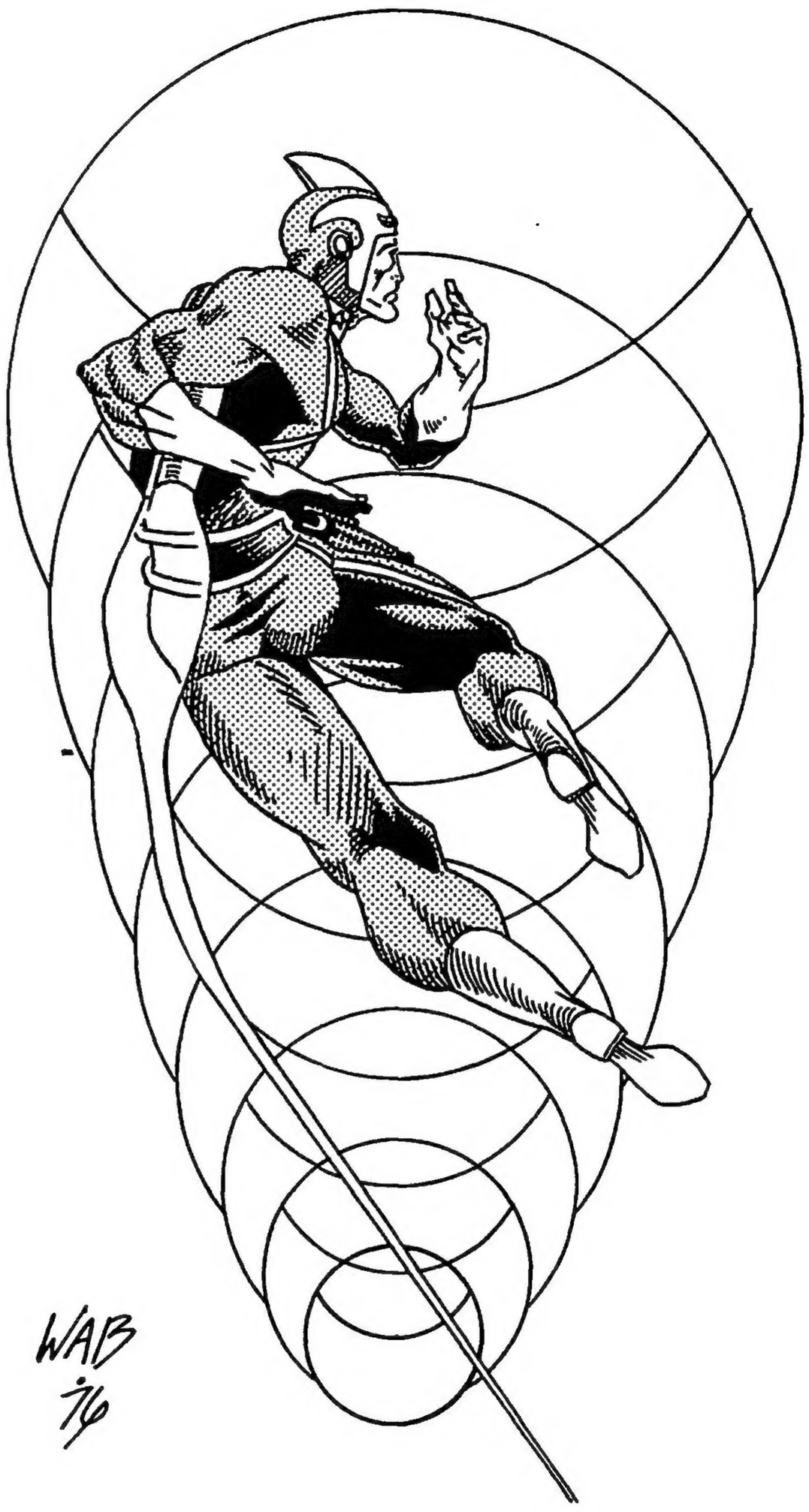
Possibly the most eagerly-awaited was ALL-STAR COMICS. Ever since the Justice Society re-surfaced in Flash #137 (1963), they have proven to be the most popular guest-stars at DC. The annual summer Justice League/Justice Society team-ups are already legendary, and have in past years extended beyond the Earth-I, Earth-II format to include Earth-3, Earth-X, and (this year) Earth-O. All of which now makes the JSA conventional enough for their own book.

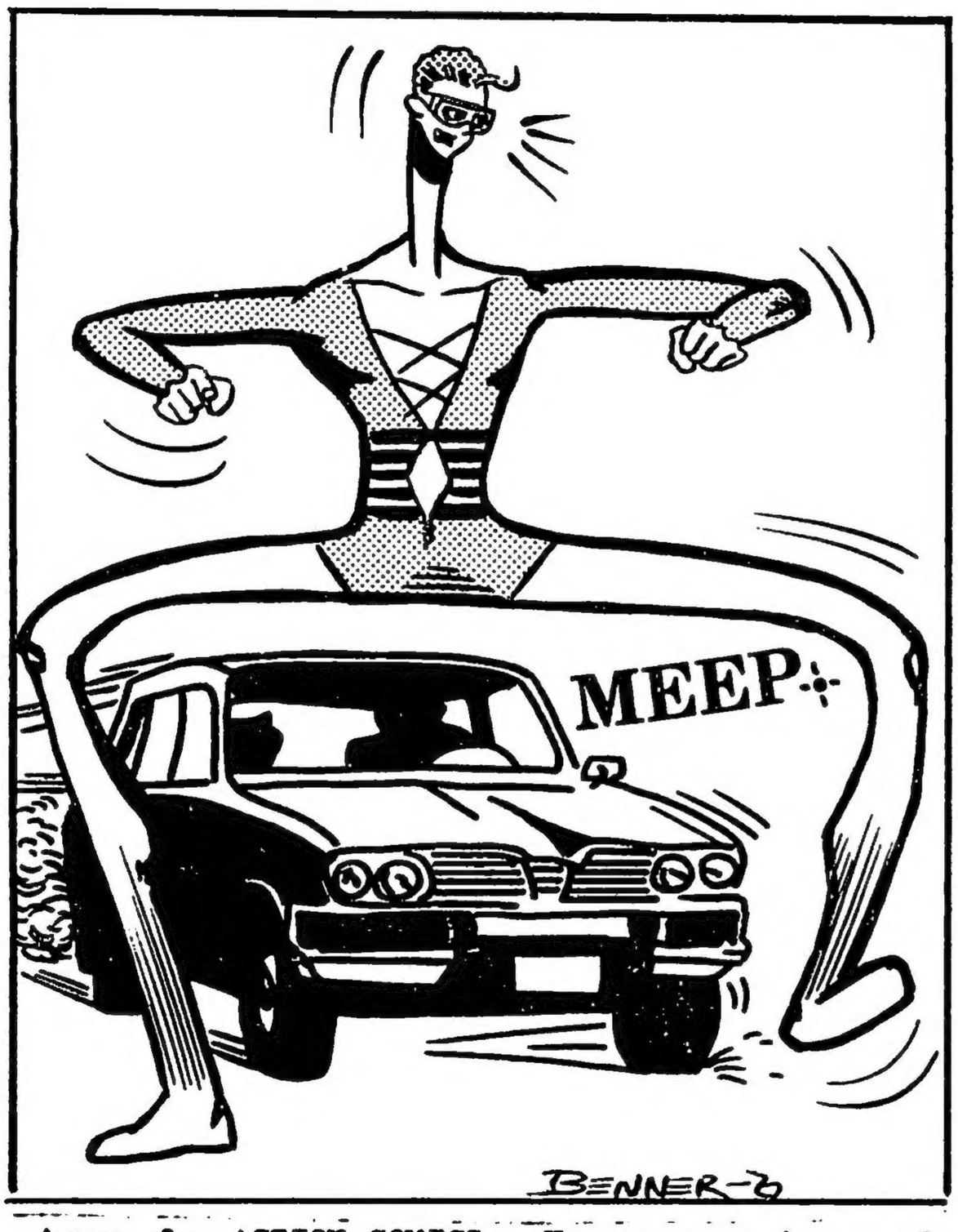
The biggest obstacle was the fact that, until now, National was afraid to put the JSA in their own book, for fear of having it detract from JLA sales. Renaming the team would be unwise, since it might be a bad sales move. However, these days, a super-hero group by another name is still a big dollar sign... and, so, we have the Super-Squad, composed of JSA members, and some new, younger heroes. All of which gives us a revival of ALL-STAR which actually bears the title, "The Justice Society of America in All-Star Comics with the Super-Squad." Considering the JSA's fame, ALL-STAR would have been enough.

The first new ALL-STAR issue was tremendous, and warmly accepted by fans. The revival ball was rolling.

Next step: Aquaman. His own book wasn't revived, basically because ADVENTURE COMICS was in sales trouble and looking for a strong lead character. The Aquaman series, under Dick Giordano, Steve Skeates, and Jim Aparo, was certainly one of the most enthusiastically accepted comics of the early 70's. Like most other comics of that period, the mystery craze killed it, but now the pendulum has swung back... so Aquaman has his chance again. The new Aquaman series in ADVENTURE is even better than the old... and Joe Orlando had the good sense to bring back Jim Aparo on the art. (Ed.Note- now, if they'd only get Skeates on the story again...)

Then, the long-awaited GREEN LANTERN #90 appeared. After the cancellation of his book, GL (along with Green Arrow and Black Canary) was merely shifted to the back of the FLASH. However, Adams and Green Arrow soon left the strip, Adams for commercial assignments, Green





Arrow for ACTION COMICS. However, an issue of DC SPECIAL (another revival) recently spotlighted Green Lantern in a series of reprints. The response was, again, overwhelming. Another DC SPECIAL was released, with more GL, and after seeing sales reports, GL was reinstated. Green Arrow was back as co-star, since, as far as sales go today, the more heroes, the merrier. The direction of the book, however, is back on Science Fiction, with GA playing a down-to-earth element in the book ("Brawling is my department, weirdness is (Green Lantern's)").

PLASTIC MAN was revived, Plas, is, to be sure, an unlikely candidate for revival. His Golden Age reprints, collected in DC SPECIAL #15, didn't spark any cash registers, but, by a fluke, PLASTIC MAN was scheduled for an FIS tryout, and, in keeping with Infantino's new policy, he was instead given his own book, a continuation of the rather disastrous PLASTIC MAN book DC published during the 60's. But even though the numbering is the same, the Plas who debuted in #11 is different from the one who appeared in #1-10. The spirit of Jack Cole's original Plas is being kept (for the most part).

BLACKHAWK was revived. The Blackhawks may be considered a super-hero group, I guess... it's the only logical rationale behind their revival. But if DC wanted to revive another group, it's beyond me why they didn't simply pick another full-fledged super-hero group like the (sigh!) DOOM PATROL. At any rate, tho some liberties are taken with the Blackhawks, it's nice to have them back.

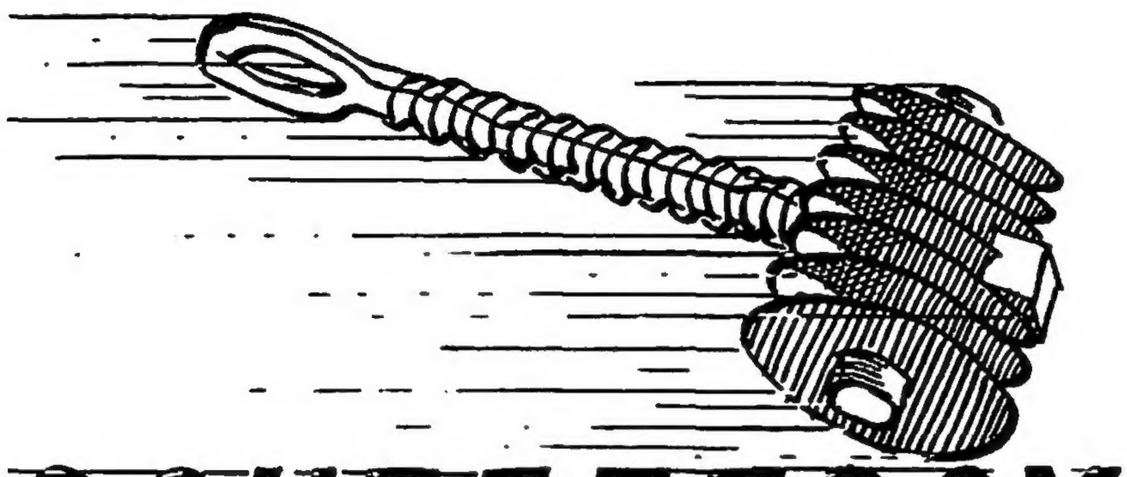
Possibly the best revival to date is METAL MEN. The group has always been popular, even after their cancellation (during their stay in Limbo they appeared in Brave & Bold three times). METAL MEN was always a very distinctive book... and, brilliantly, Gerry Conway brought it back equally distinctive. The Walt Simonson art gives it a flavor unlike any DC, which is perfect for the group... and though there are some problems with the scripting end (which should be solved when Conway goes back to Marvel), the book is still the most readable and easily the most fun DC of all.

Future Revivals? They're still coming. MISTER MIRACLE was effectively reintroduced in the New Gods FIS, after which he appeared in a "feeler" issue of BRAVE & BOLD, which is the springboard for his own magazine's revival. Mr. Miracle was always an excellent seller, but when Kirby dropped him, he stayed dropped... obviously, Kirby would have no one handling his characters except him. But the King is back at Marvel, and has no say in the matter now, so MISTER MIRACLE is being revived. As yet, I don't know who will be doing it.

SUPER-TEAM FAMILY, another reprint book, will go to all-new material soon, and will have yet another revival as its lead feature... the CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN. This long-time DC favorite is, like BLACKHAWK, a rather surprising revival, as it has not been preceeded by any tryouts (at least, not in the last few years) nor were sales at the end of the Challs career in their own book enough encouragement to warrant their comeback. I suppose a margin must be left for hit-and-miss, however, which could explain the Challs' long-awaited return.

Another super-group, this time more of a sure thing, will be revived soon... the TEEN TITANS. There will reportedly be a TT cartoon show, to boot. The Titans' own book, which started out as a sort of "Junior Justice League," developed into one of the finest books DC ever put out. Not having seen the revival yet, I can't say if it will remain that way, but judging from the track record of the revivals so far, the odds are in its favor.

DC's revival craze is rapidly approaching feverish proportions. They've already revived all their stable super-groups (except for... sigh... the DOOM PATROL) and have dipped into the well of solo characters, too. I suggest that we all enjoy it while we can. Either the revival craze will totally bomb and end in a slew of mass-cancellations, or it will prove to be so beneficial to the company that in a year or two we'll see the revival of REX, THE WONDER DOG and BROTHER POWER, THE GEEK (they seem to be willing to bring back anything but the DOOM PATROL).



SQUEEZEBOX SERENADE

BY: KJ ROBBINS

Howdy, y'all, and welcome to the first installment of "Squeezebox Serenade." I hope that you'll find what follows to be of some interest, but remember, if you don't like some of the comments, tough break. These remarks are mine and mine alone. If they should stir you into some form of response, delightful. I'd be very glad to get some feedback from you, 'cause it gets awful lonely when it seems like you're the only comics fan in Montana. My address is: KJ Robbins, 1314 Cooper St., Missoula, Montana 59801.

By the time this fanzine sees print, Archie Goodwin will be the editor-in-chief of whatever remaining Marvel Comics aren't edited/written by Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Jack Kirby, and Gerry Conway. I think that Mr. Goodwin is a very good successor to Marv Wolfman, who resigned that position in order to write more. Unfortunately, Mr.Goodwin was the third man approached for the job. The first to get the offer was Roy Thomas, who was Marvel's editor for a couple of years (1972-74) before Len Wein and Marv Wolfman. At first, Thomas agreed to return to his former job, but later declined in favor of moving to California. Thomas recommended Gerry Conway, a former Marvel writer, who was then writing and editing for DC. Unfortunately, Marvel took up Thomas' recommendation and Conway was offered the top spot at Marvel Comics. Conway accepted for a little while, and therein lies the cause of the bitter feelings I have toward Marvel Comics.

The prime cause of my dislike for Gerry Conway is the resignation of Steve Englehart from Marvel Comics. As I've repeatedly made clear to all my comic fan friends, I regard Steve Englehart as the best writer in the field. My interpretations of the various accounts of his departure see only one cause: Conway's arrogance.

It seems that when Conway turned down the editor's job, he was offered a very generous contract allowing him a certain number of pages per month. Apparently, he was allowed to choose the books he was to edit/write. One of the first books he picked was the AVENGERS. The fact that Englehart was writing the AVENGERS and didn't want to leave it bothered Conway not at all. He had his contract and he wanted the AVENGERS, so the matter was settled. Is it any wonder that Englehart was annoyed enoughto leave Marvel?

It seems to me that Englehart was screwed over, not only by Conway, but by Marvel Comics Group as well. Since the book in question, the AVENGERS, is one of Marvel's top sellers, and the fannish response to Englehart's writing of the series was largely favorable, Englehart should have been entitled to some protection from Marvel's higher-ups when his position was threatened. Instead, he was shafted. Conway, with his contract, was Marvel's fair-haired boy.

And Conway didn't stop there. Looking around for other books to write, he decided he wanted to do the DEFENDERS, too. Steve Gerber was writing that book, but what difference did that make? Three guesses as to the identity of the DEFENDERS' newest writer. Gerber took Conway's move somewhat better than Englehart, as he's still working for Marvel.

Casting about for a few more titles, Conway landed MS.MARVEL, IRON MAN (from Goodwin, who will be busy as editor), CAPTAIN MARVEL (from Chris Claremont), GHOST RIDER (which can only be an improvement after Tony Isabella), WARLOCK (from the departed Jim Starlin) and a new monthly title. And what will this new title, undoubtedly bursting with originality and new concepts be? Well, the tentative title is PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN. No doubt, with AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, MARVEL TEAM-UP, the reprinted MARVEL TALES, and the Electric Company's SPIDEY SUPER-STORIES, fandom was simply begging for a fifth (four of them monthlies) Spider-Man magazine. Let's hear it for originality. It's just too bad that Len Wein edits his own work, or Conway could have taken his AMAZING SPIDER-MAN away from him like he did Englehart's AVENGERS and Gerber's DEFENDERS and spared us this fifth wheel on the Spider-mobile.

What galls me most about Conway is his apparent arrogance. Regarding his actions since his return to Marvel and some comments of his that I read before he left last year, I get the feeling that he is all that matters in his personal universe. He doesn't give a damn for the views of the comics fans who buy his stuff, and he could care less about the people who may already be working on whatever book he sets his eyes on. Gerry Conway is interested in Gerry Conway. Everybody else can take a flying leap. (Ed.Note- which isn't quite what KJ said, but let's try not to get too emotional about all this)

Another unfortunate departure from the ranks of Marvel is Jim Starlin. The stated cause for his departure is a disagreement between Starlin and Marvel over a minor point in one of his WARLOCK stories. Starlin felt no change should have been made. Much as I admire Starlin's work, I hold little sympathy for him on this

point. Quitting over a minor change seems like a prima donna move. Certainly, he had a great deal of leeway in the writing of WARLOCK, but his word was not inviolate. If the management felt a minor change was necessary, he should have accepted it. Surely, it wouldn't have destroyed the strip.

Still, it's sad to see Starlin joining the ranks of Smith, Adams, and Steranko in the list of comicdom's departed greats. Starlin has said that he is leaving comics for good, with no intention of returning. Comic fans will be deprived of one of the most innovative artist/writers to ever grace the graphic page. Presently, he has joined Grey Morrow and Mike Ploog on the animation of Ralph Bakshi's live action/animation adaptation of Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS. Good luck and good fortune is wished to him by all of his admirers.

Another disappearance from Marvel Comics is that of Don McGregor, but, as far as I know, he neither resigned nor was he fired. He was cancelled out of work. From working on WAR OF THE WORLDS, BLACK PANTHER, and POWER MAN a few months ago, McGregor was shifted and cancelled into unemployment. First, he had to give POWER MAN to Marv Wolfman, probably because he was unable to meet the monthly deadlines. Then, he had to give the superb BLACK PANTHER up to Jack Kirby, which I regard as an unfortunate occurrence. Better the Panther should be cancelled than have Kirby writing it like he does CAPTAIN AMERICA. After that, McGregor lost WOTW through cancellation. He was given Deathlok, which was summarily cancelled. In fact, the COMIC READER, where I get most of my news, wasn't even sure that the single McGregor-written DEATHLOK story would reach the stands.

So, that leaves McGregor with nothing to write. This upsets me, since he, Englehart, and Gerber are my favorite writers in comics. Frankly, I would much, much prefer to see McGregor writing WARLOCK than Conway, since he is much closer to Starlin's cosmic story plane than Conway. But, when Merry Gerry waves his magic contract...

I've been a long time talking here about That Which I Do Not Like, so I'll change course and fill y'all in on a few things I enjoy. First of all, there's HOWARD THE DUCK. I love HOWARD. Everybody loves HOWARD. As a matter of fact, Howard is so well loved that some of the more mercenary souls among us have been corralling Howard's books and are selling them to less fortunate souls for outrageous prices, which arouses in me a desire for the good ol' days of lynch laws and necktie parties. But, I digress. I promised happy stuff, so how's this? In October, Marvel will release a HOWARD THE DUCK TREASURY EDITION, reprinting his first MAN-THING story, the two GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING solos, and the infamous HOWARD THE DUCK#1. Plus, there will be a new, 20-page Gerber/Colan/Leialoha story chronicling Howard's first meeting with the Defenders. ("Talking duck? Hulk doesn't understand.") And, Howard's regular comic will become monthly with #6.

Some other fine items to look into are WEIRD HEROES and FICTION ILLUSTRATED, both brought to you by Byron Preiss and Pyramid books. I plan to do an article-review in Wowee#2 on these books, so a short run-down will do for now. WEIRD HEROES is an anthology title, providing the reader with a new breed of pulp heroes. Presently, I have only WH: Vol.2, which is an excellent book. Featured in it are Doc Phoenix, Ted White's successor to Doc Savage; Cordwainer Bird, Harlan Ellison's nom de plume come to life; Viva, Steve Englehart's hooker-turned-jungle-queen; and Elliot Maggin's "gonzo storytelling." These and other stories feature illustrations by Jim Steranko, Steve Fabian, Esteban Maroto, Neal Adams, Tom Sutton, and Ralph Reese. Plus, there is a 20-page graphic story by Alex Niño. FICTION ILLUSTRATED is Preiss' experiment in the field of graphic novels. Volume one features SCHLOMO RAVEN, a very short, very Jewish detective set in the early 40's. It's by Preiss, Sutton, Kenneth Smith, and Marie Severin. Volume two is STARFAWN, a Star Trek-style science fiction story, written by Preiss, illustrated by Fabian, and colored by Severin. Volume three will feature either SON OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, by Preiss and Reese, or CHANDLER, Jim Steranko's first major comics work in five years. Whichever it is, I'll be covering it and the rest of Preiss' WEIRD HEROES and FICTION ILLUSTRATED books in an in-depth article in the next Wowee. See you then, and don't forget to write.

NOT FAR FROM SAN STREET

by JACK FROST and DEAN MULLANEY

One of the most phenomenal happenings in the comics world over the past few years has been the rapid growth of the unique union we have come to know as the superhero group. The Silver Age has seen many superheroes band together to form super-groups , beginning with the Justice League of America. And with their popularity at an all-time high, we may reflect and ask just what makes these assemblages so appealing. Well, the reasons are many and varied, but we'll try to enumerate on some of the more important ones: the whys, hows, the wherefores, and the therefores.

Since their birth, the superheroes have been the most popular type of entertainment the comic world has had to offer. Despite infatuations with S&S, horror, Kung-Fu, and the like, the only constant seller remains the superhero. They have weathered the storms and continue to thrive, today expanding their horizons to include everything from cosmic adventurers to urban daredevils (small 'd').

Therefore, it logically stands to reason that if one character attains a great appeal from the public, said character congregated with similarly popular characters would amass a combined appeal which would be greater than the separate ones. This theory was borne out since the forties with one character guest-starring in another's book. And the obvious outgrowth of this philosophy is that of a permanent guest-star situation: the formation of a super-group. With a number of separately appealing personalities together issue after issue, there is seemingly no limit to its success.

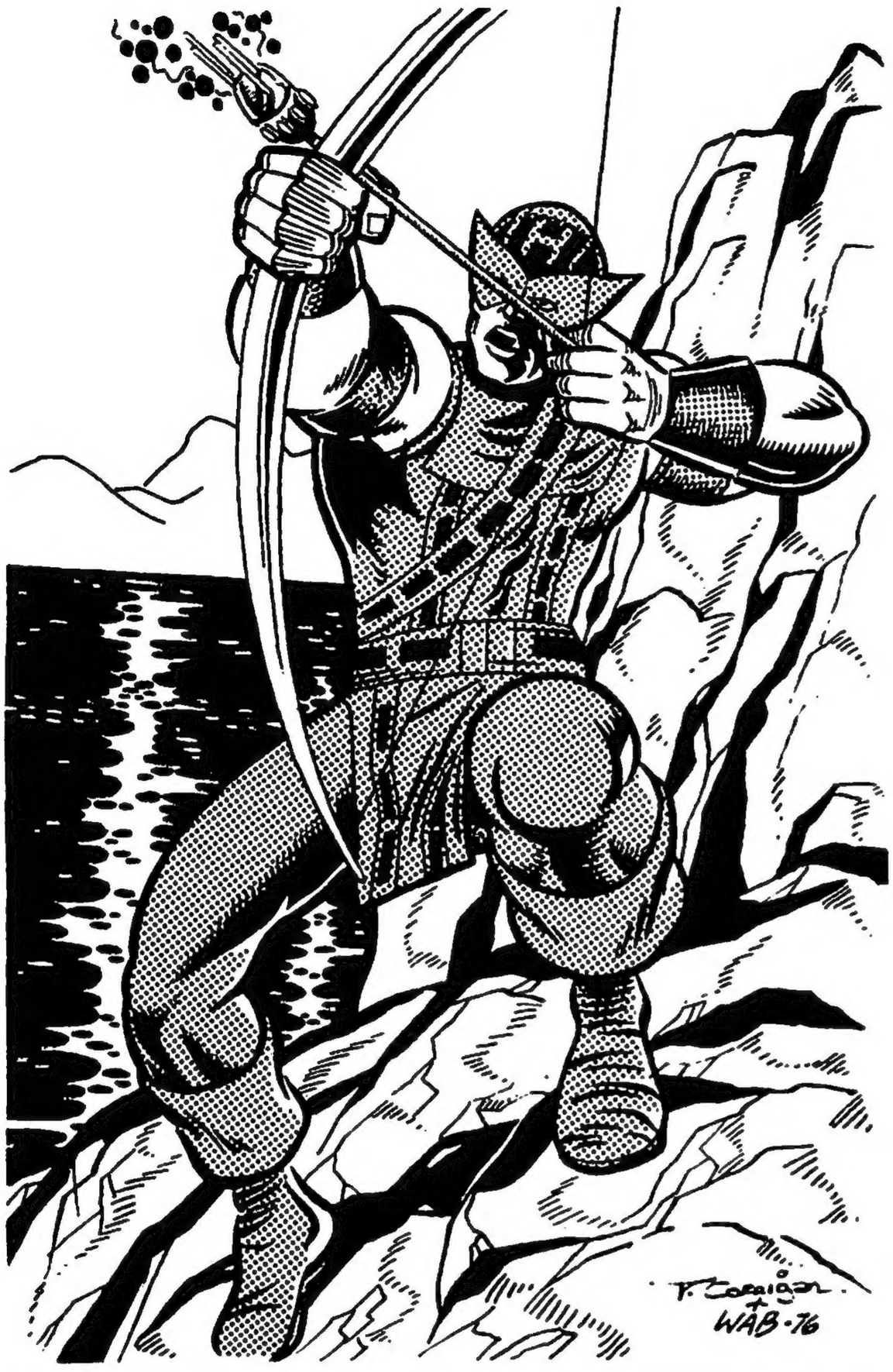
One undeniable attribute of a group of superheroes is the exhiliration of seeing not one but several of one's favorite characters acting as a unit to do battle, whether against

a powerful single villain, or an offsetting group of super-villains. These legions offer a brand of action which lends itself perfectly towards more grandiose stories, the scope of which are rarely equalled by the exploits of a single character. To name but a remarkable and memorable two, we easily recall the Kree/Skrull war in the Avengers and the recurring blend of the heroes of Earth 1 and 2 in JLA.

Yet this grand scale is only one level of the super-group's appeal. Just as important as the action-oriented detail mentioned above is the ever-important question of character interrelations involved whenever two or more heroes get together. Character interplay has been a very influential, and sometimes dominant factor in the development of the super-groups. This element of interest in its contemporary form can be easily traced to the Lee/Kirby Fantastic Four. Yet as the FF were not established characters prior to their becoming a team, allow us to quickly move on in favor of Lee and Kirby's first true-blue super-group, the Avengers.

With DC showing great success with their entry, the JLA, Marvel decided to try their hand at such an offering, and the results were seen in the first issue of the Avengers (years later, the Defenders were formed in a similar manner. With the Avengers, Lee and Kirby followed thru with their successful formula of trying to make their characters as humanly believeable as possible. As the one-to one relationship is the most difficult one to harness, especially when the personalities involved are out of the ordinary, it seems a logical second step that when the super-egos that accompany super-powers clash, conflicts would arise. This addition to the super-group idea, that of having personalities that did conflict makes the Avengers what we consider the archetype of the modern-day guper-group. In contrast to the homogeneous JLA, the Avengers were beset with dissension from the very beginning, with one member, the Hulk, leaving after only the second issue. In the case of the superhero, egos often expand beyond their natural horizons, and as Lee and Kirby pointed out, personality conflicts could and did exist in the comic book world.

Yet another interesting, and also recently dominant factor in the history of the super-group has been the wider use of characters who do not maintain a series of their own. Without the benefit of a solo book, these characters have a more viable influence on the ingathering parties as the team's book offers their only place for development. When in Avengers #16, Marvel withdrew Giant-Man, the Wasp, Thor, and



Iron Man from the group, only to replace them with Hawkeye, the Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver, the concept of the super-group constituency changed forever. The character frictions became more predominant at this early stage as Hawkeye and Quicksilver repeatedly demanded the role of leader of this illustrious group. Not so oddly, the Scarlet Witch was never even mentioned as a possible leader, but the treatment of superheroines in super-groups (and solo) remains untold for a future analysis. Returning to the use of unbased characters, the super-groups have likewise become training ground for the introduction of spanking new characters, such as the Vision. So that now, while still being a meeting ground for everyone's favorite characters, the super-groups simultaneously maintain a mostly unbased membership.

While the JLA and the Avengers remain the two most salient precedent setters in the genre, today we see a great proliferation of super-groups of all kinds. Just to elucidate how successful the formula has become, Marvel has more than seven such teams on the market with such entries as the Invaders, Champions, and Inhumans. And DC hasn't been standing still either with such offerings as the Freedom Fighters and the Super Squad. And lest we forget, Charlton's Doomsday +1, a team book from a company that had always avoided them like the plague. The concourses thru the past few years have expanded the genre to include not only superheroes, but super-villains, monsters, and others as well. With such a diversity of characters, it's no small wonder that the super-group has continued to be of importance in the comic book world.

In stating that the super-group formula is at an all-time high in popularity, we'd be foolish to overlook the fact that such gatherings are perhaps necessary given the declining overall comics sales. One must take into account that with sales down in the entire field, the reader may demand more characters and more action for his/her money. It is impossible to expound on this, drawing any conclusion whatsoever, but it must be considered as a possible reason for the outbreak of so many groups in such a short time.

Also noticeable of late has been the re-emergence of the team-up mag. Again returning to the origins of the super-group concept, the team-up magazines are also on a boom, with DC's Brave and Bold still going strong and Marvel moving along finely with their Marvel Team-Up and Marvel Two-In-One, now both monthly. Even some established single character books have switched to the team-up idea, with GL/GA, Cap and the Falcon, and Daredevil and the Black Widow being three prime examples. Also, on the economic horizon, combined books such as The Superman Family, the Tarzan Family, and The Batman Family have been formed to offset declining sales on separate titles. This could be one alternative to the cancelling of favorite titles, but not a very promising one.

So, as the super-group, or simpler team-up formats become more and more visible in the comic world, a reflection is due, and a lot of thinking concerning the reasons, effects, and by-products scanned. Keep you chin up... the next group may not be far from Yancy Street.

SAVIOR

ALMOST SEVEN YEARS AGO, IN NOVEMBER OF 1996, AT THE WORLD SCIENCE CONFEDERATION MEETINGS IN SWITZERLAND..

...BUT I HAVE COME TO THIS GREAT CONFERENCE FOR MORE THAN THE GENEROUS ACCOLADES OF MY PEERS. IT IS MY INTENTION TO *INTRODUCE* TODAY A PLAN THAT WILL BE MY *LIFE'S* WORK--A *MACHINE* THAT WILL *SAVE THE WORLD!*

THE GREAT DR. EDWARD KETTERING, WHOSE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE HAD BEEN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THE AGE, HAD BEGUN HIS GREATEST PROJECT, THE "MIRACLE MACHINE."

YES, I KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY, SCIENTISTS YOURSELVES, WILL SCOFF AT THE IDEA OF A MACHINE THAT WILL SOLVE HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS. BUT I BELIEVE IT *WILL* WORK, AND I BELIEVE IT TO BE OUR GREATEST OPPORTUNITY TO USE *SCIENCE* AS A TOOL TO ACHIEVE THESE ENDS.

KETTERING WAS HELD IN GREAT RESPECT BY THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY. HIS PLAN WAS ASSURED OF ACCEPTANCE; HE USED THE AVAILABLE PLATFORM TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD'S MASSES...

MY MACHINE, AS IT HAS BEEN DESIGNED, WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEMS THAT TROUBLE US MOST. BY THIS I MEAN THE *ARMS RACE, STARVATION, DISEASE*, AND *CORRUPTION.*

CREDITS

WRITER:-- *BILL BLYBERG*

ARTIST & LETTERER-- *PETE IRO*

THE SCIENCE CONVENTION GAVE HIM ITS **SUPPORT**, AND WITHIN SEVERAL MONTHS, WORLD PUBLIC ACCLAIM HAD **FORCED** THE GREAT POWERS TO GIVE THE DOCTOR **FULL** FINANCIAL BACKING.

THRU THE AID OF THE UNITED NATIONS, HE WAS GIVEN THE SUPERVISORY POWER TO COMPLETE HIS PROJECT.

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS DONE WAS TO CONSTRUCT A SPACE STATION TO USE AS A HEADQUARTERS.

SOON AFTER ITS COMPLETION I STOOD WITH DR. KETTERING AS HE LOOKED OUT OVER A **WORLD** THAT WAS VIRTUALLY HIS.

WELL, DR. KETTERING, YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED--A CHANCE TO **ORGANIZE** THE **WORLD**--TO SEE ITS PEOPLE WORKING **TOGETHER** IN **PEACE** --AND IF YOUR PLANS ARE ACCOMPLISHED, TO SEE THAT THIS WILL BECOME **PERMANENT**!

I, OF COURSE, KNEW LITTLE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE. I WAS CLOSE TO THE **CENTER** OF THE GREAT PROJECT, BUT THE ULTIMATE GOALS OF DR. KETTERING, AND THE **USE** OF THE MACHINE WERE UNKNOWN TO ME. THE DOCTOR GAVE CERTAIN BITS OF INFORMATION THAT COULD BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC...

I WAS JUST BEGINNING AS HIS ASSISTANT AT THAT TIME. AS SUCH, I WAS HELD IN GREAT ESTEEM BY THE MANY WHO CONSIDERED DR. KETTERING TO BE THE GREATEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

YES, WILHELM, I HAVE GREAT OPPORTUNITY... GREAT... POWER...

THE "MIRACLE MACHINE" BEGAN TO BE ASSEMBLED. IT WAS SO **VAST** AND COMPLICATED THAT NO ONE KNEW HOW IT **WORKED**, OR EVEN WHAT IT WAS SUPPOSED TO **DO**. ONLY DR. KETTERING KNEW **THAT**.

TODAY, WE HAVE A SPECIAL GUEST, THE YOUNG SCIENTIST WHO SO ABLY ASSISTS DR. KETTERING IN HIS WORK, **DR. WILHELM VON SHONS**. DR. VON SHONS, CAN YOU GIVE OUR VIEWERS ANY INFORMATION ON THE **MIRACLE MACHINE**?

WELL, MR. LEONARDS, DR. KETTERING INFORMS ME THAT...

MY CONCERN ABOUT HIS ATTITUDE **GREW** OVER THE YEARS THAT WE WORKED ON THE PROJECT. HE SEEMED TO **ENJOY** HIS POWER— THIS WORRIED ME. AND HE HAD **LITTLE** PATIENCE WITH THE PETTY QUARRELS OF HIS AIDES...

IF YOU FOOLS CAN'T WORK TOGETHER WITHOUT CONSTANTLY BRINGING OUT YOUR NATIONALISTIC DIFFERENCES, I'LL GET OTHER PEOPLE HERE.

WE ARE WORKING TO **SAVE** THE WORLD FROM THE THINGS YOU SEEM TO **REVEL** IN.

I WAS **VERY** MUCH WORRIED ABOUT HIS **MENTAL STABILITY** BUT I WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE REACTION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THERE WAS SUCH GREAT FAITH IN DR. KETTERING. THE GREAT MASSES OF THE POOR AND HOPES FOR THEIR LIVES. I DECIDED TO CONTINUE MY WORK ON THE PROJECT FOR THEIR SAKE.

THE PROJECT SLOWLY MOVED FORWARD AND DR. KETTERING'S DEPRESSION WORSENED. THEN HE SEEMED TO **BRIGHTEN**, AND AFTER MUCH FEVERISH ACTIVITY IN THE GREATEST OF **SECRECY**, HE ANNOUNCED THAT THE PROJECT WAS NEAR TO **COMPLETION**.

YES, WILHELM, IN ANOTHER TWO MONTHS WE'LL BE **FINISHED** AND THE WORLD WILL BE MUCH BETTER OFF FOR OUR EFFORTS. THE RESPONSIBILITY HAS BEEN GREAT, BUT THE FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT WILL BE THAT MUCH GREATER!

HE SEEMED TO ME TO BE VERY UNSTABLE. I HAD GREAT RESPECT FOR HIS SCIENTIFIC ABILITY, AND THAT WORRIED ME **MORE**, FOR WHAT **HAVOC** COULD A MAD GENIUS WITH SUCH **TOTAL** POWER BRING ABOUT? I SPOKE WITH A FRIEND, A PSYCHIATRIST; HIS ANSWER TO MY QUERIES DISTURBED ME **GREATLY**...

I THINK YOU MAY **HAVE** SOMETHING THERE, WILLIE— I'VE NOTICED SOME ODD THINGS ABOUT KETTERING **MYSELF**. BUT WHAT COULD BE **DONE** WITH A MAN IN HIS POSITION?

WHAT **INDEED** COULD BE DONE I DETERMINED TO TRY MY BEST TO UNDERSTAND THE WORKINGS OF THE MECHANICAL COMPLEX WE HAD CONSTRUCTED MY WORK WAS **HURRIED**, BUT I FELT I WAS NEARING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE **MIRACLE MACHINE**.

IT WAS TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE MACHINE WAS TO BE SET INTO OPERATION THAT I CAME UPON A DEVICE ON THE SPACESHIP SIMILIAR TO THE ONE ON THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH. IT WAS A PART OF THE PROJECT THAT HAD BEEN **PERSONALLY** SUPERVISED BY DR. KETTERING. ITS CONSTRUCTION HAD BEGUN NEAR THE TIME I HAD NOTICED DR. KETTERING'S ATTITUDE IMPROVING. I HAD TO KNOW **WHAT** IT WAS...

AS I DETERMINED THE FUNCTION OF THE DEVICE, A HORRIBLE POSSIBILITY OCCURED TO ME... I FOUND THAT THIS WAS A DEVICE OF **DESTRUCTION**. IT UTILIZED A PRINCIPLE I WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH, BUT ITS **PURPOSE** WAS CLEAR. I SURMISE THAT DR. KETTERING HAD GONE **MAD** AS THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF BUILDING HIS "MIRACLE MACHINE" HAD BECOME CLEAR. HE MUST HAVE DECIDED IN HIS MADNESS THAT THE ONLY WAY TO RID THE EARTH OF ITS PROBLEMS WAS TO **DESTROY** IT!

MY **GOD!** IF HE USES THIS DEVICE FROM THE SHIP, IT WILL DESTROY THE **WORLD!**

I HAD TO WORK **ALONE**. MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION AS A WHOLE HAD CONVINCED ME I WAS RIGHT. BUT SURELY NO ONE ELSE WOULD BELIEVE ME.

I'LL TRY TO **DISCONNECT** THE THING... THAT MAY BUY ME TIME TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO STOP HIM!

I FOUND THAT THE SUPERVISION AND SECURITY WERE TOO STRICT TO ATTEMPT AN **ELIMINATION** OF THE MACHINE. I HAD TOP LEVEL CLEARANCE, BUT SUCH ACTION WOULD SURELY BE NOTICED. I WAS FORCED TO CHANGE MY PLANS.

ONLY A FEW **DAYS** UNTIL THE DEVICE IS SET OFF. MY ONE CHANCE IS TO SAY I'M GOING TO MAKE A FEW ADJUSTMENTS IN THE APPARATUS AT THE KEY POINT!

SECURITY CLEARANCE

THE SECURITY IN THAT AREA WAS NATURALLY THE **STRICTEST**. DR. KETTERING HAD SEEN TO **THAT**. BUT MY GAMBLE WAS SUCCESSFUL--I WAS ABLE TO WORK ON THE PART I **WANTED** TO. TIME WAS RUNNING OUT. I DECIDED TO TAKE A DESPERATE CHANCE...

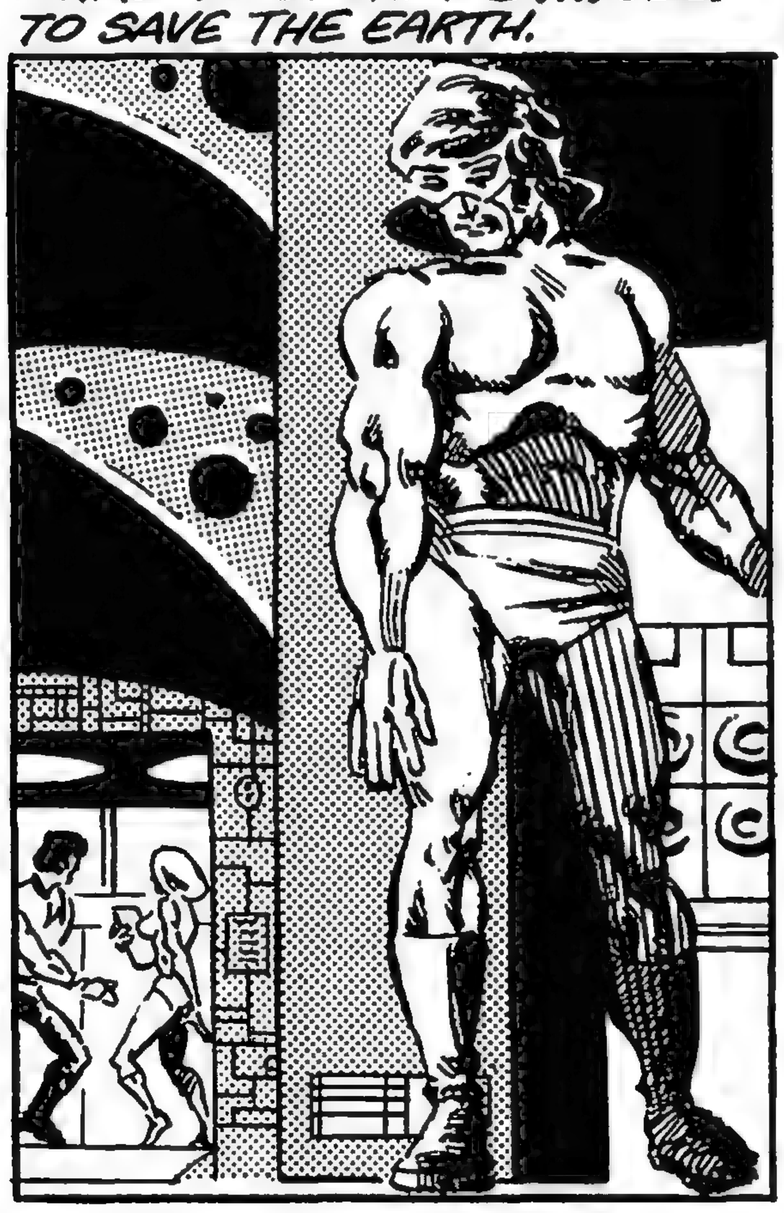
IF I REVERSE MY WIRING **HERE**... THE **SHIP** MAY BE DESTROYED INSTEAD OF THE EARTH. IF I HAD MORE TIME TO WORK...

BUT I HAD **NO** MORE TIME. THE CHANCE IN THE WIRING WOULD HAVE TO DO. I HAD FINISHED THE WORK, BUT I HAD A FEELING THAT DR. KETTERING WAS AWARE OF MY PLANS. HE SEEMED TO BE NERVOUS ABOUT **SOMETHING** WHEN I SPOKE WITH HIM. THE DAY BEFORE THE MACHINE WAS TO BE PUT INTO OPERATION, HE CALLED ME INTO HIS OFFICE...

WILHELM, I THINK IT WOULD BE WISE IF YOU WERE TO GO TO EARTH FOR THE CEREMONIES AT **THAT** END TOMORROW. I'LL BE ABLE TO HANDLE THINGS UP HERE.

OF COURSE, SIR, WHATEVER YOU WISH.

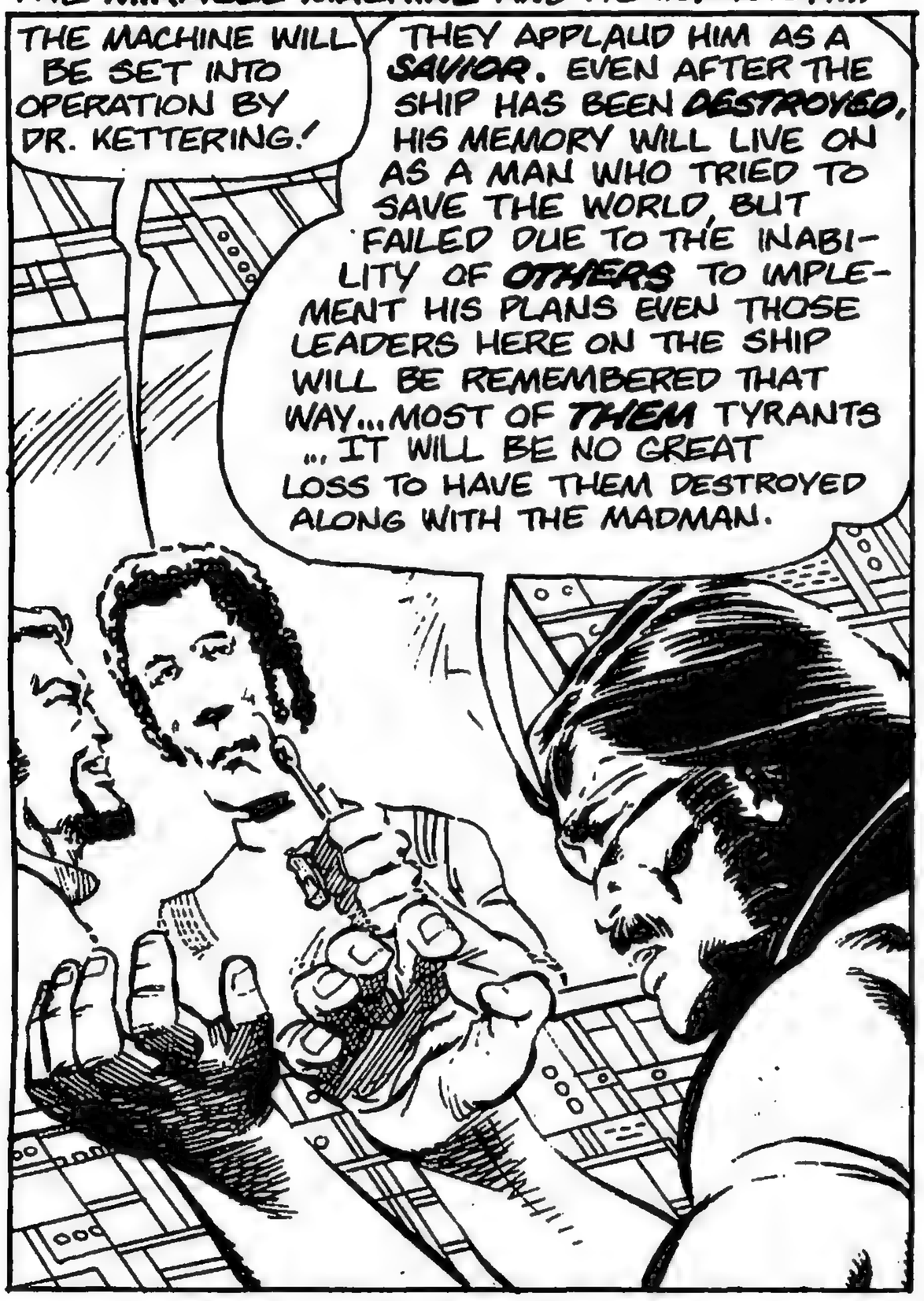
I MADE MY GOOD-BYES TO THE STAFF AND DR. KETTERING. I MANAGED TO AVOID THEM IN ALL THE CONFUSION OF PREPARATION FOR THE BIG EVENT. THEY THOUGHT I HAD GONE, BUT I INTENDED TO **STAY**, AND KEEP AN EYE ON KETTERING. IF HE HAD GUESSED MY ACTIONS, HE WOULD CORRECT THE CHANGES I HAD MADE. ALTHOUGH IT MEANT STAYING ON THE DOOMED SHIP I **HAD** TO SACRIFICE **MYSELF** TO SAVE THE EARTH.



A FEW HOURS BEFORE THE CEREMONIES WERE TO BEGIN, THE **LEADERS** OF ALL THE NATIONS REPRESENTED IN THE PROJECT, VIRTUALLY EVERY NATION IN THE WORLD, BEGAN TO ARRIVE ON THE SHIP.

THEY ASSEMBLED IN THE GREAT MEETING HALL OF THE SHIP, AND AS DR. KETTERING ENTERRED, THE CEREMONIES **BEGAN** I, IN MY HIDDEN POST, KEPT WATCH OVER THE AREA I HAD WORKED ON. NO INSPECTION OF IT WAS MADE. I WAS CERTAIN THAT THE DOCTOR HAD **NOT** GUESSED WHAT I HAD DONE.

OVER THE MONITORS IN THE HALL, I COULD HEAR THE SPEECHES BEING MADE TO COMMEMORATE THE **MIRACLE MACHINE** AND ITS INVENTOR...


THE MACHINE WILL BE SET INTO OPERATION BY DR. KETTERING!
THEY APPLAUD HIM AS A **SAVIOR**. EVEN AFTER THE SHIP HAS BEEN **DESTROYED**, HIS MEMORY WILL LIVE ON AS A MAN WHO TRIED TO SAVE THE WORLD, BUT FAILED DUE TO THE INABILITY OF **OTHERS** TO IMPLEMENT HIS PLANS EVEN THOSE LEADERS HERE ON THE SHIP WILL BE REMEMBERED THAT WAY...MOST OF **THEM** TYRANTS ...IT WILL BE NO GREAT LOSS TO HAVE THEM DESTROYED ALONG WITH THE MADMAN.

IN THE GREAT HALL, DR. KETTERING HAD RISEN TO SPEAK...

THIS IS A GREAT DAY... IT SIGNALS THE **BEGINNING** OF A GOLDEN AGE FOR MANKIND. MY WORK OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS HAS BEEN TO BUILD A DEVICE THAT WOULD ACCOMPLISH **FOR** MAN WHAT HE COULD **NOT** DO FOR HIMSELF. IT WILL SERVE TO **UNITE** ALL THE PEOPLE OF OUR PLANET. BUT IT WILL **NOT** FUNCTION AS MANY HAVE ENVISIONED IT...
5.

I HEARD HIS WORDS, AND I KNEW I HAD BEEN RIGHT. IT WAS MEANT TO WORK FAR DIFFERENTLY THAN **ANY** HAD IMAGINED. BUT IT WOULD WORK DIFFERENTLY THAN **HE** HAD IMAGINED, TOO.

I'VE SAVED THE WORLD!

THEN, OVER THE MONITOR, I HEARD HIS SPEECH GO ON...

...FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE WORK OVER MOST OF THE PAST SEVEN YEARS HAS BEEN TO BUY ***TIME***. I HAD NO MACHINE PLANNED THAT COULD ***TRULY SOLVE*** OUR PROBLEMS AS A PEOPLE. BUT I ***HAD*** SUCCEEDED IN GETTING PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE AND BACKGROUNDS TO WORK TOGETHER...

HIS WORDS NOW CONTRADICTED WHAT I HAD SUPPOSED WERE HIS PLANS...

...***THIS*** WAS OUR HOPE. WE HAD TO WORK ***TOGETHER***, AND WE ***DID***. DESPITE THE IMPROVEMENT IN OUR ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIPS, WE STILL HAD THE SAME ***HATRED*** FOR EACH OTHER ALONG THE LINES OF GENERALITIES: RACES, NATIONS, RELIGIONS...

I KNEW ***THEN*** THAT I HAD GUESSED ***WRONGLY***-SOMETHING WAS ***NOT*** AS I HAD SEEN IT TO BE. DR. KETTERING HAD DIFFERENT PLANS THAN I HAD ***THOUGHT***. I BURST FROM MY CONCEALMENT...

AND SO I REALIZED THAT MY PLAN HAD BEEN A ***FAILURE***. THEN, A SHORT TIME AGO, A THOUGHT CAME TO ME. THE WAY TO REMOVE THE LAST REMAINING ***BARRIERS*** TO TOTAL INTEGRATION OF OUR PEOPLE WAS TO...

MY ***GOD***! I HAVE TO GET TO THE HALL!

I WAS SEIZED BY SECURITY GUARDS OUTSIDE THE HALL... I WAS IN A STATE OF ***SHOCK***... I ***KNEW*** I HAD ***NO*** CHANCE TO PREVENT WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

...REMOVE THE ***SOURCE*** OF THOSE BARRIERS...THE PETTY MEN WHO ***CONTROLLED*** SOCIETY, AND KEPT MAN ***APART*** FROM HIS FELLOW MAN TO SERVE ***THEIR OWN*** ENDS...

LET ME IN... I,...OH, NO...

I ***HEARD*** THE WORDS OF A MAN I HAD ***THOUGHT*** MAD WITH ***POWER***. THEN, I ***KNEW*** DR. KETTERING HAD PUSHED THE BUTTON AS HIS SPEECH CAME TO ITS SHOCKING CONCLUSION...

I SPEAK OF ***YOU*** HERE TODAY, THE "***LEADERS***" OF OUR WORLD. MY MACHINE WILL ***DESTROY*** THIS SHIP, AND ALL ON IT. YOU WILL ***DIE*** AND BE CONSIDERED MARTYRS. AND FOR THE ***FIRST*** TIME IN YOUR EVIL LIVES, YOU WILL BE ***WORTH*** SOMETHING TO YOUR PEOPLE!

RELEASE

CLICK!

I HEARD THE EARTH I HAD THOUGHT I SAVED **EXPLODE**. MY REVERSAL OF THE WIRING HAD **BEEN RESPONSIBLE**. KETTERING HAD KNOWN ALL ALONG THAT NO MACHINE SUCH AS HE HAD PROPOSED **COULD** BE BUILT. HIS PURPOSE HAD BEEN TO GET MEN TO WORK TOGETHER AND THUS, THOSE PROBLEMS **WOULD** HAVE BEEN SOLVED. BUT HE SAW IT WASN'T ENOUGH, AND FOLLOWED WITH THE **LOGICAL** MOVE. MY FAILURE TO SEE HIS INTENTIONS HAD NOW DESTROYED THE WORLD. THEN I **REALIZED** THAT BECAUSE OF ME THE WORLD WOULD **SUFFER** NO LONGER... ALL ITS PROBLEMS HAD BEEN **ELIMINATED**... YES... I **HAD** SAVED THE WORLD...

THE END...

THE DUCK

BY-BOB RODI

The Duck is one of the century's literary phenomena. He is certainly without a doubt THE comic book phenomenon, artistically. Unlike other character types (i.e. barbarians, gothic heroines, super-heroes, monsters, etc.), the Duck transcends his carefully delineated personality to become the ultimate fictional character, the only type adaptable to any genre.

The Duck has seen his growth come about almost entirely in comics. To the comic book writer, the Duck is like a blank canvas is to a painter. A key to any worlds the writer's imagination cares to dwell in. The Duck can be worked into anything, poured into any mold. And, while the painter is not guaranteed of success after his canvas is finished, the comic book writer has the advantage of the Duck's previously established personality, a personality which lends itself to any situation, and seasons the stories until they are irresistably appealing.

The Duck's personality... just what is it? The Duck is a humanist, a man of good will. He may be greedy, lustful, or influenced by some other, more powerful vice, but he is still an innocent humanitarian, who, when an emergency arises, will place all aside in favor of helping his fellow fowl. And still, the Duck is ill-tempered, and almost undoubtedly has high blood pressure. He does not take to insults and holds his personal honor in great esteem.

In short, the Duck embodies all the qualities, both the shortcomings and the beauty, that are inherent in all mankind.

The Duck is Everyman. No more, no less.

Is it poetic irony that mankind should be so flawlessly reflected in the Duck? He is approximately three feet tall, white or pale yellow, downy, big-eyed, with bigger feet and bill. The physical resemblance to mankind is non-existent.

The Duck evolved under the guidance of Carl Barks, backed by Walt Disney studios. The prototype Duck was Donald. It was Donald who established all the Duck characteristics we have discussed. Originally confined to Duckburg, a fictional town which also was inhabited by other animals, Donald found himself stagnating. In the midst of Duckburg, were vacantly happy mice, sleepy dogs, and amorous cows. This was not the Duck's place. The Duck had ambitions beyond 'Funny Animal' job security. Of the Duck population in Duckburg, one Duck had to transcend the Duckburg facade and become... a fantasy hero. Thus, under Carl Barks, was created the legendary Uncle $crooge.

$crooge McDuck, whose limitless wealth gave him access to the world. He included his nephew Donald, as well as Donald's staunchly loyal nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie, in his travels. Duckburg became nothing more than a pit-stop. The Ducks raced thru every popular comic-book genre in existence. In outer space, they shared cosmic adventures with green space-ducks. In exotic Asian countries, they fought the forces of nature. Under the sea, in a dense jungle, in the Old West, in haunted houses,... no stone was left unturned.

The 1970's came, and world taste in literature changed. Comic books changed along with it. People no longer wanted to read about the noble heroes they had previously supported. The 1970's saw the advent of the anti-hero, the downbeat, raunchy protagonist who was less than admirable, but still hero material because of his ability to take life on his own terms.

And so, quietly, did Howard the Duck enter the picture, pulled from his funny animal world into our own, a world he never made. What better anti-hero could there be? A social misfit, rejected by a society he could never hope to join, and yet, his difference allows him to make even more incisive observations into our social structure.

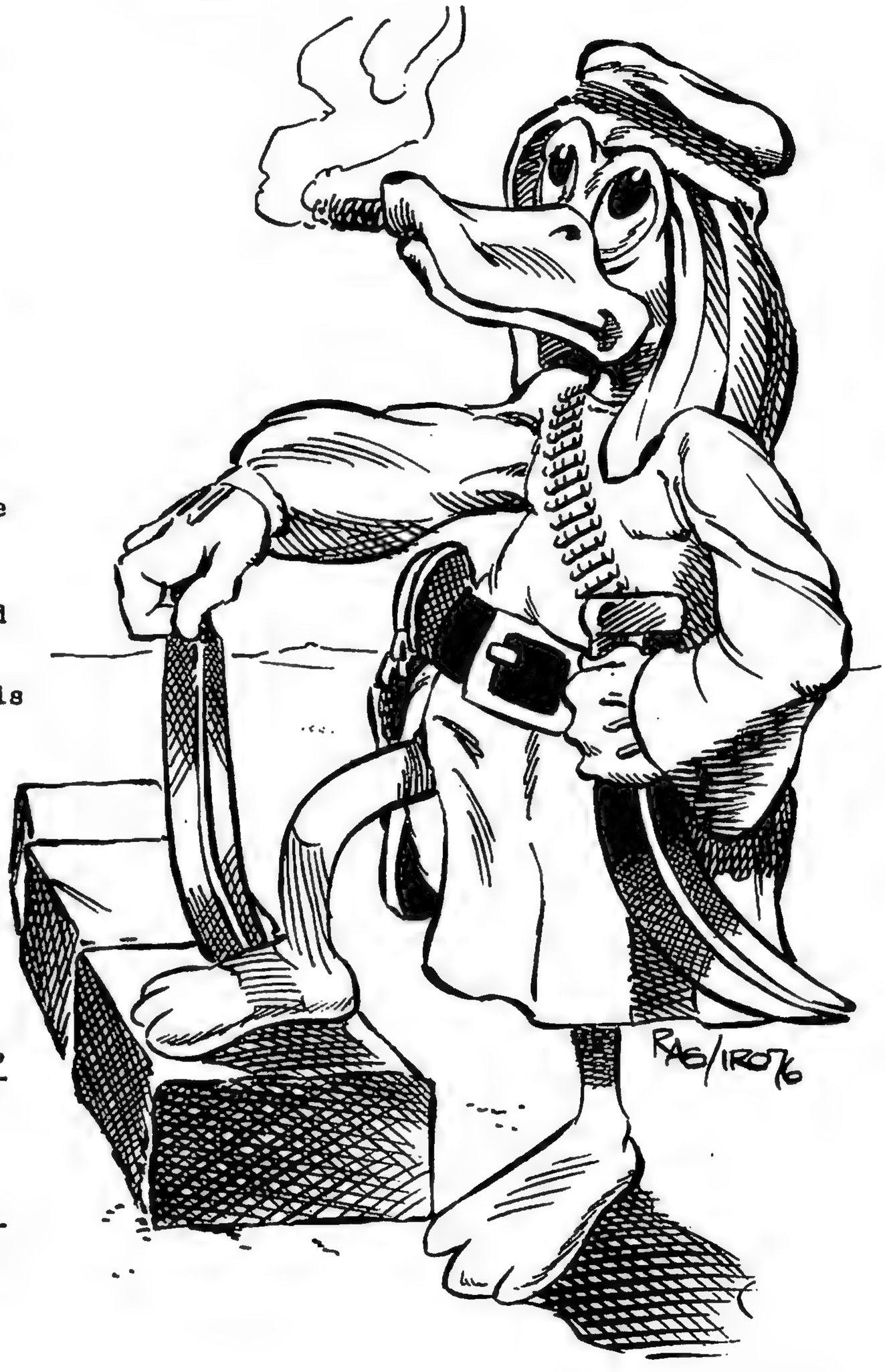
And aside from that, he is a Duck. THE Duck of the seventies.

Howard is the antithesis of his ancestors, further proving the versatility of the Duck as the definitive literary character. The previous Ducks had exotic adventures. Howard lives in Cleveland, capital of urban drudgery. Yet, Howard, the Duck, endures; no, more than endures. He sets new literary milestones with each appearance.

Howard has shown us man's survival instinct. From the moment he arrived in Cleveland, friendless, we have been with him as he was jailed, naked, then on the brink of suicide, but each time his humanitarianism called him from his own troubles to the aid of someone else.

Such is the lot of the Duck. To serve as a mirror for mankind. To show the dignity inherent in us all, the depth of human suffering and the breadth of human endurance. To reveal, amidst all its trials, the nobility and the honor and the love that make up the human spirit.

Waaugh!



BEGINNING: A SERIES OF REPORTS ON:

S.H.I.E.L.D.

BY- KJ ROBBINS

PART ONE: BACKGROUND & ENEMIES

In May of 1965, Nick Fury, the rough and tumble commando sergeant of World War II, entered the James Bond world of espionage with the premiere of NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD in Strange Tales #135. The SHIELD series ran for four years, through 34 issues of Strange Tales (#135-168) and 15 issues of its own title before giving in to poor sales. SHIELD has also made numerous appearances in almost all of Marvel's superhero titles and has been a part of the Captain America series for many years.

SHIELD was Marvel Comics' contribution to the popularity of secret agent fiction in the mid-sixties, the comics' answer to the movies' James Bond and TV's 'The Man from UNCLE.' The intrepid SHIELD agents, with Nick Fury forever in the lead, did battle with numerous elements of evil around the globe, saving the world from domination by the likes of HYDRA and AIM, the comics' counterparts of Bond's SPECTRE and UNCLE's THRUSH.

In the first SHIELD story, Nick Fury was a colonel in the CIA. His introduction to SHIELD came by way of a Pentagon directive to sit for the making of a set of Life Model Decoys, extremely sophisticated and perfectly lifelike android replicas of Fury himself. Within minutes of their being turned loose on the city streets, Fury witnessed the destruction of a quartet of LMDs by unknown attackers. Shortly afterward, while being driven to an unknown destination, Fury's car was attacked by a fighter jet. Disposing of the jet with sidewinder missiles fired from the rear of the car, Fury's driver informed him of the existence of an international organization called SHIELD. Their attackers in the jet, and those who destroyed the LMDs, were agents of HYDRA, a fanatical organization dedicated to world domination.

Arriving at his destination, Fury was introduced to Tony Stark, playboy millionaire and head of SHIELD's Special Weaponry Section. He in turn introduced Fury to a council in which he recognized famous men from every nation in the world. This council informed Fury of SHIELD and the reason for its creation: the destruction of HYDRA.

The council also told Fury the reason for his prescence there. They believed that he was the man most capable of leading SHIELD to its goal. As Tony Stark put it, "A human weapon is needed to smash the entire HYDRA network. A man who'll devote his life to it. A man like you, Fury."

At first, Fury refused, feeling himself incapable of leading an organization with the technology and power of SHIELD. Moments later, he discovered that his chair was booby-trapped and, with the speed and skill born of a thousand combat missions, tore the chair from the floor and threw it through a window, discovering he was aboard the heli-carrier, SHIELD's flying headquarters. Following that, Fury agreed to lead SHIELD in its mission to destroy HYDRA.

Recruiting two former members of his WWII commando squad, Dum Dum Dugan and Gabe Jones, Fury began his work in earnest. At one point, he was captured by HYDRA, but escaped with the help of Laura Brown, the daughter of the Imperial HYDRA. During his escape, a SHIELD assualt squad, led by Dugan and Jones, attacked HYDRA's headquarters and, in the ensuing battle, the Imperial Hydra, whose real name was Arnold Brown, was slain by several of his followers who did not recognize him without his costume. Laura Brown in return for her assistance in Fury's escape, was allowed to 'escape' from her SHIELD captors by Fury's intervention. She later returned to join SHIELD.

But Fury's job didn't end with the defeat of HYDRA. As always, there were others who were ready to take up where HYDRA left off. Over the years, SHIELD has fought the menaces of the Fixer and Mentallo, the Druid, HYDRA splinter groups THEM, AIM, and the Secret Empire, the Hatemonger, Baron Strucker, and, many times, the revitalized HYDRA.

In recent years, after suffering defeat at the hands of SHIELD, Captain America, and the HULK, HYDRA has reorganized itself and sought out more powerful leaders. The present Supreme Hydra is Silvermane, former head of the ancient Maggia crime syndicate. He has recruited as his division chiefs such powerful super-menaces as Blackwing, Commander Kraken, Man-Killer, El Jaguar, Jackhammer, and the HYDRA robot, Dreadnought. HYDRA's most recent drive for power was stalled when the forces of SHIELD, Daredevil and the Black Widow destroyed their secret Shea Stadium headquarters and captured division chiefs Man-Killer, El Jaguar, Jackhammer, and Mentallo, and destroyed the Dreadnought. Silvermane and Blackwing escaped, and for the moment, the menace of HYDRA lies dormant. For a full account of the SHIELD/Daredevil-Black Widow/HYDRA confrontation, readers are directed to see Daredevil #120-123.

One of SHIELD's greatest opponents was the oriental mastermind, the Yellow Claw. Several times, the Claw came close to ending Nick Fury's career and his life. Finally, in a climactic battle between the forces of SHIELD and the Yellow Claw, Fury defeated his opponent, only to discover that the Claw and his associates were robots. To this day, Fury does not know that he and SHIELD were used as pieces in a Chess game between Doctor Doom and a gaming machine called the Prime Mover.

One foe who had an enormous effect upon the life of Nick Fury was Scorpio, a member of the Zodiac crime cartel. Although they met only twice, the second meeting held a shocking revelation for Fury. In that meeting, Scorpio had captured Fury and set him up as a new model LMD set for testing, and disguised himself as the SHIELD ramrod in order to witness Fury's death. Once again, Fury escaped his doom, and in battle with Scorpio, tore the villain's mask loose, revealing the face of his own brother, Jake Fury. Scorpio/Jake plunged through a window and into a river below. It is not known whether or not he survived, since a body was never found. In the most recent appearance by Zodiac, however, they had been joined by a new Scorpio.

Since the cancellation of Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD, Fury and his agents have made numerous appearances in almost all of Marvel's comics. Nick Fury and SHIELD have, for many years, been a part of the Captain America strip, beginning when Cap was still a feature in Tales of Suspense. SHIELD's most recent appearances have been in Daredevil, the Man-Wolf series in Creatures on the Loose, and in the Incredible Hulk, where agent Clay Quartermain has been acting as liason between SHIELD and the US Army. Little is known of SHIELD's future plans, although a one-issue feature is scheduled for a coming Marvel Spotlight. What will come after that is known only to the minds of the Marvel Comics Group.

Finis.

When you disregard the rare anthology books, virtually every comic book on the market has a continuing lead character (with the possible exception of Iron Man, who's iron, not lead). (Humble apologies for that...)

In each story, a dynamic conflict is set up, usually between two parties, the hero and the villain, or, to take into account villain-starrers and horror books (such as the Joker and Tomb of Dracula), let us say between the main character and his/her antagonist. Three-way conflicts are rare, and usually reducible to a number of fluctuating two-way ones (such as, on occasion, the Fantastic Four- Doc Doom-Silver Surfer relationship). The point is, the star of the book is virtually always at one end of the figure of conflict. To wit:

Fantastic Four - Doc Doom;
Spidey - Doc Ock;
Dracula - just about everybody;
... and so on.

Inevitably, when such a rule is postulated, exceptions tend to pop up. Cases in point: Man-Thing and Spirit... the background heroes.

Both of these series have been characterized by a number of stories in which the star, the continuing hero (or monster) was not only not one of the main protagonists (i.e. not part of the figure of conflict) but even seemed a bit superfluous to the plot, appearing mainly in cameos (or in the background) and somehow intruding in situations in which he had no noticeable reason to appear. This approach brought on much praise from those readers who appreciated the resultant off-beat (to use a hackneyed phrase) stories; much abuse from those who felt they had been cheated into putting down their money for a hero (or monster) who had virtually nothing to do with the story.

The reason for these stories and this approach is easy to define: both Steve Gerber and Will Eisner were more concerned with setting up conflicts between real people than with telling stories about heroes or monsters; these stories had to result from the nature of these people as such (whether for the sake of a dramatic story, a moral point, or preferably both), and it was thus impossible to fit the star of the series into the framework of the plot. In other words, they were shoved out of the limelight because they couldn't be used.

The role, the function these ousted stars then take on, and how they are woven into the stories, these questions are much more interesting and relevant.

First, the Spirit.

I have chosen, to back up and explicit any general statements, stories from Warren's Spirit #10 (Oct.1975), I trust a fairly representative sample of the series as a whole. We have in this book no less than four stories in which Our Masked Hero is not in any way one of the main characters of the plot (maybe the only 'Hero', but that's irrelevant): "Death is My Destiny"; "A Time-Stop"; "Sound"; and "The Meanest Man in the World."

Curiously enough, in the first story listed above, the Spirit seems to be very much part of the plot indeed, even indulging in a page-long fistfight with Jigger and generally making himself obtrusive; yet, he is still not one of the points of conflict, as the real, the basic conflict in the story is between Vane, Smiley, and the, uh, "spirit" of the gun; also, the resolution of the drama does not at all include the Spirit; hence he is not truly a basic part of the plot, as the capture of Jigger could just as well have been done by any cop as far as the story is concerned (but, in that case it would not be a Spirit story, right? We'll come to that).

This is the key point: influence the ending. In each of the four stories listed above, the outcome is not determined by the Spirit himself, but is a logical (from a dramatic if not a verisimilar point of view) conclusion to the conflict and the characters in question. Note how little Our Hero has to do with each of the endings:

- he is not even physically present in the final scene.
- the death of Tymely is virtually self-induced.
- the phone call is too late.
- Splinter Weevil's conversion is his own doing.

At this point, there is a tendency to ask, "Then why the hell are they made out to be Spirit stories?"

The answer is that, while not actively involved in the plot and not playing any pivotal roles, the Spirit is a reference point that indicates that all the events chronicled in "his" series take place in the same fictional world (theoretically, any two pieces of fiction without a common fictional character would be considered as happening in different "worlds), thus giving it depth and texture to an extent that few fictional worlds have. Will Eisner's Spirit world (no relation to Kirby's) contains an incredibly vast gallery of people and locations, such as, drawing from the four stories covered in this article: Jigger, Vane and Smiley; Amos File, the old gunsmith; Marc Tymely, cartoonist Ben Day (haha), Splinter Weevil, etc., etc., ad infinitum but certainly not nauseum. Without a running character to tie them all together, each little patch of life thus described would be a separate entity, instead of combining with all the others to form the gloriously rich and varied tapestry of life that is Will Eisner's Spirit.

Parenthetical remark:

Now, there is a simpler, more direct, albeit artistically annoying and slightly cynical argument that states that the reason the Spirit is featured in these stories is that Eisner did want to do independant short stories, but, considering the title of the mag (or, originally, series), has to sneak in the hero somewhere? It should be considered, and is in a sense probably true. It is very easy to take facts that have sprung out of sheer technical (or- today's high-emotional-quotient word: commercial) necessity and prove them artistic wonders.

But then, is it important? Shouldn't the final result, and only the final result be considered, rather than the various goings-on that led to it? Let me restate the Spirit World Continuity Law stated above: I'm not saying that Eisner featured the Spirit in all the stories to achieve that effect (I would probably be wrong). I am saying that the effect was achieved, period.

As an example and reference for film buffs in the audience (usually a high percentage of comics fandom), does the fact that Bogdanovich's "Targets" was written to accomodate film clips from an unfinished Karloff horror flick, and

to use up several acting hours that great actor owed the producer, diminish the value and the impact of this movie?

In art - <u>any</u> art - the final effect is the <u>only</u> valid criterion for critical evaluation. So, if Eisner or Bogdanovich (Gerber, as will be pointed out later, is a different case- I'm plugging later paragraphs to keep you hooked, dear reader) manage to not only circumvent but even use the limitations of the medium, or of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the piece of art, to produce powerful stories or movies, this needn't be focused upon for critical judgement: not positively, nor negatively. It works both ways.

We now return to our regularly scheduled article, with apologies for going off on tangents, but the above point is an important one and I might as well fend off the above-mentioned cynical remarks as soon as possible.

Now a look at Man-Thing and this book's mildly calamitous cast of characters (at last).

For this series, I have chosen as references eight stories (totalling eleven issues): "No Choice of Colors" (Fear #12); "A Question of Survival" (F#18); the Clown stories (Man-Thing #s 5 & 6); the Dawg stories (MT #s 9 & 10); "Song Cry..." (MT #12); "Decay Meets the Mad Viking" (MT #16); The Kid's Night Out" (Giant-Size MT #4); and the book burning issues (MT #s 17 & 18), which are what I consider to be the most important "human interest" or maybe "sociological criticsm" stories. I realize its something akin to suicide to have a Man-Thing article which doesn't even mention Howard the Duck, so there, he's mentioned. I'm not taking into account the fantasy (I mean outright, wild-eyed stuff with Dakimh and his group), parody (Wundarr), or traditional monster yarns (G-SMT #2), as they don't fit into the Man-Thing as a background character series (as I see it at least).

One immediately notes a structural similarity with the Spirit stories (see how neatly it

all ties together) in that the dynamic tension/ conflict is set up between parties other than the supposed "star", and that these conflicts work their way towards logical conclusions without any true interference from this "star." If there is any attempted interference, it is usually ineffective and amounts to nothing in the end. For example, in the stories chosen:

- Jackson, temporarily saved by Manny, is nonetheless killed by Corey.
- All the bus passengers, with the exception of two "uninvolved" (or "innocents"?), are killed.
- Darrel is driven to his suicide.
- Dawg is killed.
- Astrid is miraculously left intact at the end of "Decay...", but though she is in one way the focal point of the conflict, she is not one of the antagonists...
- ...and she bites the dust two issues later anyway.
- And Edmond Winshed, the ultimate example of the group, has been killed before the story even begins.

Perhaps I should instead examine why Gerber has such a reputation for downbeat endings. An unfounded rumor if I ever heard one...

(In anticipated rebuttal to those who present MT#s 6 & 12 as upbeat-ending stories: granted, Brian Lazarus is saved, but Steve himself admitted it was a false ending; granted, Darrel's soul is supposedly saved, but his life on Earth was miserable nonetheless - besides, it's in a way grim that the only bright point in the series is brought on by such mystical business which I suspect was more to be taken as a thematic point, rather than at face value.)

However, the reader will object, in each case, despite his allegedly being exterior to the conflict, Man-Thing does do his thing; every issue contains the near-traditional "Whatever knows fear... (and whoever can't complete that sentence can stop reading right here)", and the thus chastised person is of course always the villain of the piece, and he always gets it in the end. How can one then pretend that the Man-Thing is not an essential part of the figure of conflict?

Let us delve into our collections and fish out an example of the "traditional" horror story, say the near-classical, reprinted and adapted-into-movies short story from the wonderful EC group, "Poetic Justice" in Haunt of Fear #12 (East Coast Classic Reprint #4), a nice little yarn about an old garbage collector viciously brutalized by a cruel, rich man, and his equally nasty son. The clincher is a series of cruel valentine that drive the old man to his suicide. This example is particularly relevant as the old man is revived as a walking pile of yecch that could give Manny a run for his money, both in Disgusting Appearance and Love For Cruel and Unusual Punishment. In case you've forgotten, the walking corpse cuts out the villain's son's heart and serves it fresh, with a valentine and an appropriate poem, to the geezer who responds with: "Good Lord!"(and probably a stifled 'choke') Did someone mention catharsis?

Right. However, in opposition to the traditional sort of catharctic horror story recounted above, in Man-Thing, the revenge is <u>not</u> perpetrated by the victim, but by a creature wholly extraneous to the conflict, who jumps into vengeful if soggy action with no rationalization other than mumbo-jumbo about empathy which as often as not contradicts itself (for example, when Manny acts "against his instinct", simply because to have him do otherwise would screw up the plot - and masochistic, or too scrupulously-honest, or just plain stupid (the same thing nowadays) Gerber all but points that out.). What Man-Thing does, pure and simple, is to restore the balance from injustice to justice; it is his sole and unique function, and it is usually quite negative and restricted to killing the guilty.

This dissociation of Man-Thing from the conflict as such was made quite explicit very early in the canon, i.e. in the second issue scripted by Gerber, Fear #12. In this issue, right after Jackson has been killed by the sadistic white guard, the following caption occurs:

"-- The whole foul incident is left with the quality of being somehow <u>unfinished.</u>"

In this quote, the empathy sense isn't even dragged out to cloud up the issue (unless it

suddenly has developed a faculty to detect unfinished incidents.). Manny is the Avenger, or Revenger, period.

I believe that if there lingers an uneasy feeling after the reading of the Man-Thing stories, rather than the total mental catharctic orgasm the traditional EC shocker engenders, it is because while the negative part of the story (the hurting or killing of the good or innocent) is a logical part of the plot, the subsequent punishment of the evil that has perpetrated the act is not a consequence of this act, but is brought on by an element, a force extraneous to the plot and is thus "unsatisfying."

In other words, we have here a recurring deus ex machina, also definable as literary cheating.

"Deus ex Machina" means "the god from the machine," and in this case, it is not used only as a concept (which is the case with e.g. Reed Richards whipping up some wonderful doohickey on the next-to-last-page and zapping the villains out of existence); Man-Thing is truly a god to the series, or, more precisely, a direct physical manifestation of the true god of the (or any) series: the author. If you assimilate the telling of a story to a puppet show, the author is the one who is pulling all the strings. This string-pulling should be as inconspicuous as possible, and it would seem downright dishonest if the puppet-master disposed of the evil puppets at the end of the play by smashing down his fist on the middle of the stage. With the 'fist' thinly disguised as Man-Thing, this is precisely what Gerber does.

Man-Thing is not part of the conflict. He does not interreact with any of the characters in question, has no true motivation, is omnipotent, and his actions, negative and destructive as they are, bring justice to the world as the author sees it. Most definitely God.

(An intriguing sidelight to the Gerber-Man-Thing relationship: in "The Kid's Night Out," Manny takes on the role of Edmond's vengeful 'spirit'; since Edmond is a transposition of Gerber himself, we have an interesting three-way relationship. The Clown stories are even more complex, as we add to the figure the book's Gerberoid-in-residence, Richard Rory, as well as the moderately Gerberish Clown; anyone care to try to unravel that foursome-in-one?...)

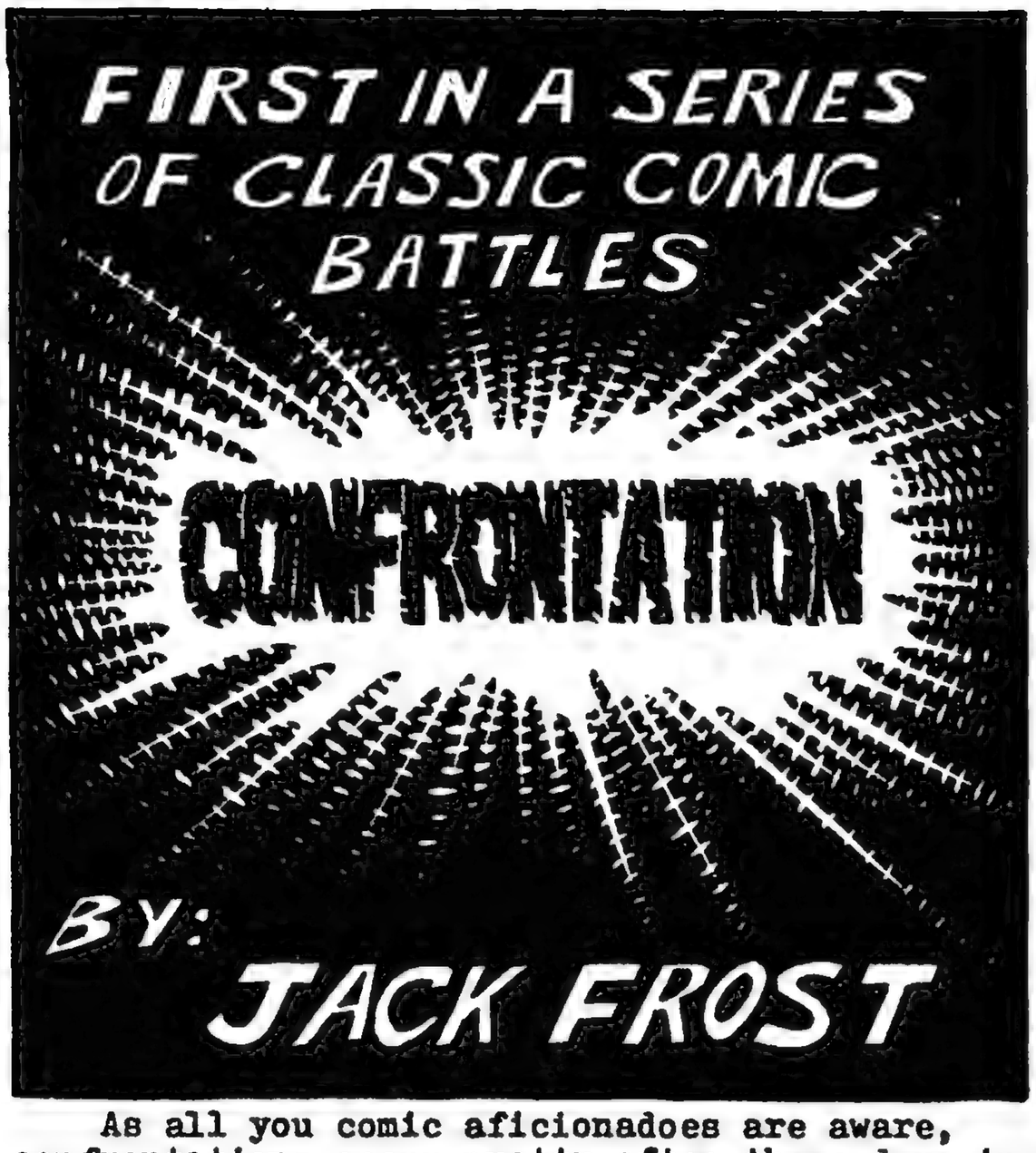
Backtracking briefly to the Spirit, we see that the basis of this series is totally different in conception. Eisner's plotlines tie themselves up neatly and satisfactorily without necessitating the intervention of any exterior force (ultimately, as with Tymely, such an outside 'intervention' is worked around as if it weren't there). The Spirit is nothing but a backdrop for the series, part of the milieu, one character among many who isn't necessarily part of the figure of conflict. Man-Thing, while also dissociated from the plot, is contrariwise the supreme and ultimate power in his book. Each has forsaken his 'hero' role, but the two progressions are diametrically opposed: Spirit becomes one of many; Man-Thing, God.

The super-hero of the comic-book, whether galactic or earthbound, human or only half so, has never, up until now, been more than a glorified, magnified cop, in charge of eradicating that alleged greatest evil of mankind, Crime. Ever since Superman took his first poke at a bankrobber, every comic book character who was not inherently evil has been fighting crooks of every strip. This role of the super-hero shows self-satisfaction and faith on our part; if your super-heroes are just bigger and better versions of the people and entities of your society, or, to put it another way, if your only wish is for a better mousetrap, you're well off.

Man-Thing discards such beliefs. To Gerber, the concept of the hero is passé and inapplicable to our current problems (see Howard the Duck #2). His 'solution' is not a glorified cop, soldier or social worker, nor even human; it's pure, destructive energy from without the society, omnipotent, unfettered by morals or laws or even humanity, guided by an entity with a dispassionate (or objective), general overview of the world we live in.

Such a power, such a 'solution', can be given two names: 'God' or 'Big Brother.'

It's possible that therein lies the true grimness of Man-Thing...



As all you comic aficionadoes are aware, confrontations occur pretty often these days in comics. Once a meeting of hero or villain, evil group vs. super-group, or just what-have-you becomes a hit with the readers, well, you can be positively sure that you haven't seen the last of them. To elaborate more on what I'm getting at, let me enumerate some classic meetings of these confrontations via examples from DC and Marvel books... Galactus vs. Fantastic Four, FF vs. Doc Doom, Luthor vs. Superman, Aquaman and Ocean Master, Batman and Joker, Mister Miracle and Granny Goodness, Squadron Supreme vs. the Avengers, and the list goes on and on and on. One particular and very popular meeting that I've grown very fond of over the years is the one-and-only, knock-down, drag-out showdown of the ever-loving, blue-eyed Thing and the incredible Hulk!

The Thing and Hulk first faced off against each other in mortal combat in the now-classic FF #'s 24 and 25. Since that time, they have battled each other on and off over the years. Their last and most recent meeting get-together was FF #'s 166 and 167. This confrontation was unique and so unlike its predecessors, in that Benjy and Greenskin fought side-by-side. Unfortunately, it was an alliance short-lived, as it didn't last because of their bellicose natures, which once again took control, and they were at it once more.

Which one is the strongest, you may ask? Glad you asked. Obviously, most think the Hulk is. Obviously again, due to his explosive emotional rage and hatred. To borrow from the Hulk's own vocabulary: "The madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk gets!"

I remember one fan mentioning years ago in some Marvel lettercol that he believed the Thing to be the stronger of the two. His theory goes that Ben, being of larger stature, more rugged, and surely stronger than the frail Bruce Banner, could assimilate more cosmic rays than Banner could those Gamma Rays. Also, note that Ben Grimm was exposed, despite his spacesuit's protection, <u>longer</u> to the cosmic rays in Space than Banner was to those Gamma rays here on Earth. So I don't see why this theory should not have a sound foundation. Thus, it is a cogent one to be sure, and, in my opinion, I agree that the Thing is actually <u>stronger</u> than the Hulk- up to a point. The Hulk, you see, does have the advantage in the long run 'cause he hardly ever tires.

In FF #112 (one of my favorite battle issues ever), we see this elicited. However, let me point out that the blue-eyed Thing actually got the best of Greenskin during this confrontation. The final outcome, that of the Hulk flooring the Thing, was just a fluke. If Benjy hadn't been distracted by Alicia's voice, well, yours truly feels the outcome would have been much more in the Thing's favor. Especially seeing as how he was just getting his second wind together. If you'll go back and count the blows, punches, etc. exchanged between the two, you'll be surprised to see that the Thing is on the offensive and the Hulk is on the defensive. Up until page 17, that is. You must remember, however, that in this meeting the Thing wasn't in full control of his mental faculties, which mitigated some of his will-power and fortitude.

This debate could go on and on as to which of these powerhouses is truly the stronger, but one thing is for certain, and that is: we have not by any means seen the last of the Thing vs. Hulk confrontations. Believe it. As it has been known to be said, Fandom Is A Way Of Life...

Jack Frost

THE RETURN OF VICTORY

LETTERING BY: PETE IRO

STORY & ART BY: WILLIE BLYBERG

OUR STORY BEGINS IN DEEP SPACE ABOARD THIS DRIFTING SHIP. THE POWER IS OFF, AND THE VESSEL HAS LAIN DORMANT FOR NO ONE KNOWS HOW LONG.

BUT THERE IS LIFE ON BOARD! A PRONE FIGURE GROANING NOISELESSLY, BEGINS TO STIR.

THE BEING RISES TO HIS FEET AND IS REVEALED TO BE ***VICTORY*** AN HEROIC AGENT OF GOOD, AND THE CENTRAL FIGURE OF THIS TALE.

UNHH-- THAT ELECTRICAL STORM! THE SHIP MUST HAVE PASSED RIGHT THRU ITS CENTER! KNOCKED OUT THE POWER...

I GUESS I LOST CONSCIOUS-NESS--!

THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY PHYSICAL DAMAGE. BETTER SEE IF ANYTHING STILL WORKS.

WITHIN MINUTES, THE DECK IS FILLED WITH FLASHING LIGHTS, AS THE SHIP'S EQUIPMENT IS REACTIVATED.

AMAZING! EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE IN PERFECT CONDITION-- NOW TO CHECK OUT THE ENGINES!

A BRILLIANT SURGE OF HEAT AND LIGHT CRACKLES INTO THE SOUNDLESS VACUUM OF SPACE!

ENGINES--FULLY OPERABLE AND FUNCTIONING!

ACCORDING TO THE DATA I'M GETTING, I'M NOT FAR OFF MY ORIGINAL COURSE... MUST HAVE DRIFTED ALONG IN PRETTY MUCH A STRAIGHT LINE.

... AND I'M CLOSER TO MY DESTINATION THAN I WOULD HAVE ANTICIPATED WITHOUT POWER TO DRIVE THE SHIP!

IN FACT, VICTORY IS IN SIGHT OF HIS OBJECTIVE, THE PLANET...

...EARTH! GOOD OLD EARTH! IT WILL INDEED BE A PLEASURE TO STAND AGAIN UPON THE WORLD OF MY ORIGIN!

PROGRAMMING THE AUTO-PILOT TO LAND AT THE COORDINATES OF EARTH'S GREATEST CITY, VICTORY TURNS FROM THE DECK.

THE SHIP CAN GET IN SMOOTHLY--

I'LL TRY TO CONTACT JUJUPTORO-POLIS!

BUT IT WOULD APPEAR THAT AT LEAST SOME EQUIPMENT *HAS* BEEN CRIPPLED AS...

NOT GETTING ANY ANSWER-- NO WAY TO KNOW IF I'M EVEN SENDING. THE STORM MUST HAVE...

ENTERING EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE! I'D BETTER...

SUDDENLY THE SHIP LURCHES VIOLENTLY OUT OF CONTROL!

BY JUUPTOR! WHAT!?

GLANCING TO THE SHIP'S FORE, VICTORY IS ASTONISHED TO SEE.

I'M UNDER WATER! I'VE CRASHED INTO AN EARTHIAN OCEAN!

AT LEAST... I ASSUME SO.

THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION SEEMS DIFFERENT SOMEHOW.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE TRUSTED THE AUTO-PILOT, BUT IT SEEMED TO BE IN PERFECT CONDITION. I'D BETTER RECHECK THAT MACHINERY!

THINKING HIS CONTROLS HAVE BEEN IMPERCEPTIBLY DAMAGED ALONG WITH HIS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICES, VICTORY TRIES TO OPERATE MANUALLY.

ODD! NO PROBLEMS!

CAN'T FIND ANYTHING WRONG WITH THE AUTOMATIC CIRCUITRY-- THIS IS CERTAINLY PUZZLING...

VICTORY SETS THE SHIP DOWN ON A LEDGE OF ROCK NEAR THE OCEAN'S FLOOR.

I'VE GOT TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S WRONG BEFORE RETURNING TO THE SURFACE!

I'LL CHECK THE OUTER HULL FIRST-- GOOD THING I AIRLOCKED THE SHIP AFTER PUTTING IT ON AUTO-PILOT!

OTHER-WISE THE INSTRUMENTS WOULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY WRECKED WHEN THE SHIP SANK.

BUT THAT STILL DOESN'T ANSWER...

BY JUUPTOR! THIS IS FANTASTIC!!

FANTASTIC PERHAPS, BUT THE TRUTH NONETHELESS! THERE HAS BEEN *NO* MALFUNCTION OF MACHINERY! THE LANDING HAS BEEN PERFECT--RIGHT OUTSIDE OF WHAT *WAS* EARTH'S MIGHTIEST CITY!

ATLANTIS! BENEATH THE OCEAN--A RUINED CITY! WHAT KIND OF MADNESS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THIS?

VICTORY IS ASTONISHED, BUT *WE* CAN ONLY WONDER ABOUT *HIS* NATURE. HOW CAN HE HAVE EXPECTED ATLANTIS TO BE ON THE SURFACE?

IF IT *WAS* WHEN HE BEGAN HIS JOURNEY, HOW *LONG* WAS HE UNCONSCIOUS IN THE VOID OF SPACE? HOW COULD HE HAVE SURVIVED? WHAT MANNER OF BEING IS HE?

NEXT--- *WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ATLANTIS?!*

Marvel Comics finds itself currently in the midst of a very severe crisis. A crisis unlike the crises of the past; one in which the overall quality of the line is not the question debated, but instead, one that centers on only a single aspect of the field. Although not as widespread, this current crisis is equally important as those previous ones, and perhaps of greater importance to the fan who wants "more" out of his/her comics than an escape through superhero wonders. The fan I speak of is one who aside from revelling in the straight but great superhero menagerie, simultaneously places a high accord on the out-growths from the norm... the small, yet ever-important mini-genre that includes such books as Doctor Strange, Jungle Action featuring the Black Panther, War of the Worlds, Omega, and Howard the Duck, those books that tread completely different paths than the multitudes of Spider-Men and Daredevils. In short, the type of book that forces you to read and re-read... think and re-think.

The three leading proponents (perhaps the only proponents) of these predominantly untreaden paths are, in my opinion, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, and Steve Englehart. Very recently, at the same time yet for completely different reasons, Don McGregor and Steve Englehart departed from the crew at 575 Madison Avenue. Yet although the reasons for their leavetakings varied, the subsequent combined effect is something that can be counted as nothing short of earth-shattering to the cause of progressive comics.

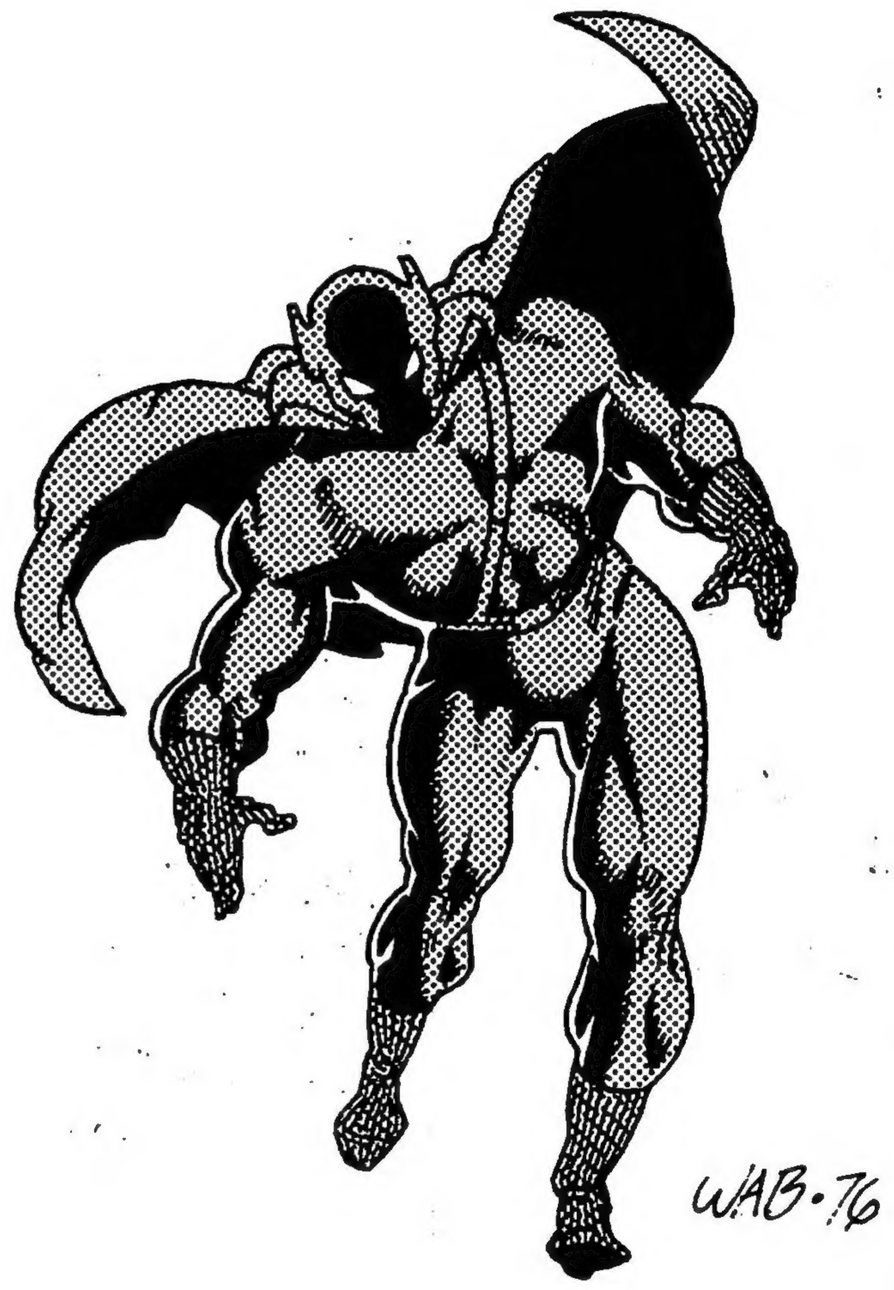
Between these two writers we've seen such philosophical meanderings as 'Panther's Rage,' the on-going trials of Doctor Strange, and the continual search for freedom by Killraven and his band of Freemen. These adventures present a radically different vision of the comic medium. In these books, escapism isn't the byline, thought is. It's been often said that art is but a reflection of life, and in the cases of these few titles, I think it fair to assume the statement applies. With 'Panther's Rage,' we found a society and a man in great turmoil, and although the society and the man were in no ways identifiable on a superficial basis, when looking beneath the surface we were able to draw comparisons to our own societies and existences. In fact using the circumstances of the story to benefit our own selves, our own thoughts. With the serialized growth of Dr. Strange from the Master of the Mystic Arts to the Sorceror Supreme, we found that through such fantasy elements as a trip to Hell and a confrontation with Satan, we were able to relate these events to our own heads. The resultant karma was/is beautiful. As Doctor Strange becomes more and more aware of the fabric of his being, so too do we readers develop. The favorable aspects of each of these books are easily understandable to those who care enough to look for them.

Yet Kirby now has the Panther, Wolfman Dr. Strange, and War of the Worlds has reached that ultimate state of oblivion... cancellation. With these three books currently out of circulation, or at least not the revolutionary trends that they were, we are left with a Marvel consisting of solely escapist writers. That is, with the one exception of Steve Gerber.

Presently I'm very excited about the likes of Marv Wolfman's Daredevil and Tomb of Dracula, Chris Claremont's Iron Fist and X-Men, and in the realm of escapist comics, Marvel is probably in better shape today than it's ever been, back to and including the Stan Lee days. There are so many fine, fine escapist writers such as Marv, Chris, Bill Mantlo, Len Wein, etal... And for what they write, these guys are without par. Yet while I do love escapist comics, and realize that they have their place, having been the foundation of the medium since its beginnings, there are some, myself included, who desire other types of comics to go hand in hand with the escapist variety.

With Don McGregor and Steve Englehart not writing for Marvel anymore, a formidable loss I'd say, what is to become of the progressive Marvel book? There have been cries throughout the years that comics need to branch out, expand into other conceptual types of books, yet today the cries lean towards a resurgence of the Stan Lee days of the mid-sixties. And so I ask, are we to have only a regaining of the sweet old flavor, as great as it was? Or are we to have this resurgence coupled with branches reaching out in other directions, progressive feelers as it would be.

You decide, the fate of comics hangs in the balance.



WOWEEKAZOWIE!

WILLIE BLYBERG 12-30-75